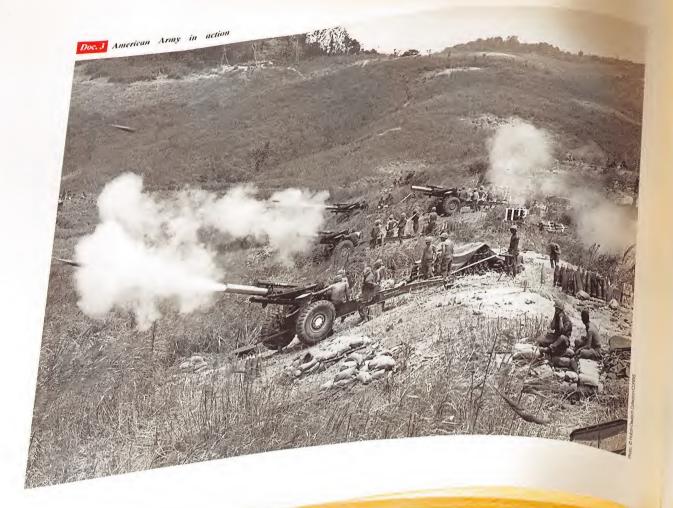


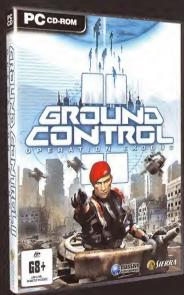
hidden.
The skilled general does not supplies three times, for ne does not nor does he transport supplies three times, for ne does not need to do so.

the captured solution and the captured solution in this way is the enemy's defeat used to supplement our strength. The goal of battle is final victory, not protracted warfare. It is through an understanding of warfare that the general protects the security of his people and of his nation.

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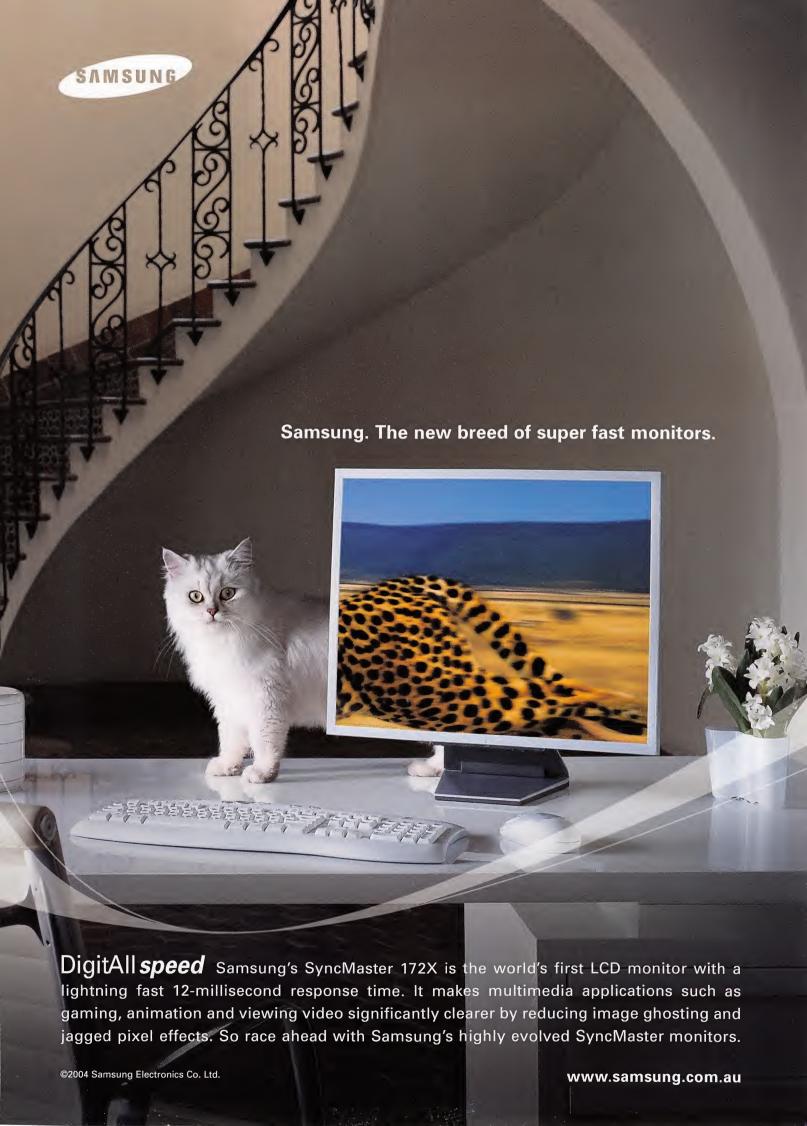












# F.E.A.R. and loading

During May, Bennett and I had the opportunity to attend the Electronic Entertainment Expo, or E3 - the largest and most important videogame event of the year. It's a rare chance for the entire industry to gather in the one location and for journalists like ourselves to sample a host of upcoming games and speak with the creative minds behind them. It's also a rather good excuse to get very, very drunk in Los Angeles.

But anyway.

Immediately upon returning to Sydney, I scribbled down some postshow impressions I planned to send to a few friends and colleagues who hadn't attended. The intention was to paint an honest picture of the event, free from all the hyperbolic bullshit you can read on any gaming website in the days and weeks after the show. You can experience the full report Bennett and I compiled elsewhere in this issue, but I figured I'd kick things off by letting you read those early thoughts I scribbled down a few weeks back...

E3, eh?

It was a strange show with attention torn between tech and concept demos for two nascent handhelds and a bunch of impressive big name titles we saw at last year's event. Surprises were few and far between.

The PSP and DS promise much: sleek media convergence (minus mp3

playback) with the former; quirky innovation (or at least a better looking GBA) with the latter. But we couldn't play the PSP nor did Nintendo demo any fully-formed games.

There were fewer PC games than last year and even fewer of them were actually playable. Many publishers preferred to display the Xbox version while adding "It's also on PC" almost as a depressing afterthought. For actually playing games this was the worst E3 I've attended.

For the most part we had to gauge potential whilst viewing obscenely polished video presentations such as Half-Life 2, STALKER or Splinter Cell 3. Even when a title was in playable form the demo pod was typically guarded by publisher reps unwilling to let anyone else experiment with their carefully orchestrated E3 build.

Bearing all this in mind, highlights on the PC front included:

- *Half-Life 2* (still a genuine FPS gameplay revolution)
- The Sims 2 (making the Sims fun again)
- FEAR (pants-wettingly intense firstperson action from the NOLF team)
- Black & White 2 (the first one morphed the world and your creature, the second will morph the gameplay)
- *Vampire: Bloodlines* (it's definitely an RPG with the added bonus of looking absolutely stunning)

On console Halo 2 stood head shoulders and the rest of the torso above everything else. Fable finally seems to be coming together as a game, despite scaling back some of its originally vaunted, loftier ambition. While Forza Motorsport, Gran Turismo 4 and Konami's Enthusia Racing vied for the serious sim accolades, Burnout 3 sideswiped every other racing game into the crash barriers. Sony's firstparty line-up was lacklustre (again), but third-party support (especially the Konami duo of Metal Gear Solid 3 and Silent Hill 4) should provide ample compensation for PS2 owners. The opposite was of course true on GC only Nintendo and Capcom could be bothered displaying Cube titles to any significant extent. Still, Resident Evil 4, Paper Mario 2 and Starfox (surprisingly) look excellent.

Worst game of the show was undoubtedly Leisure Suit Larry. Word is that Sierra is now looking to resurrect its other adventure franchises - Kings Quest, Police Quest, Space Quest etc. The possibility of the Magna Cum Laude team having anything to do with it makes me feel nauseous.

Can't wait til next year though.

David Wildgoose Editor



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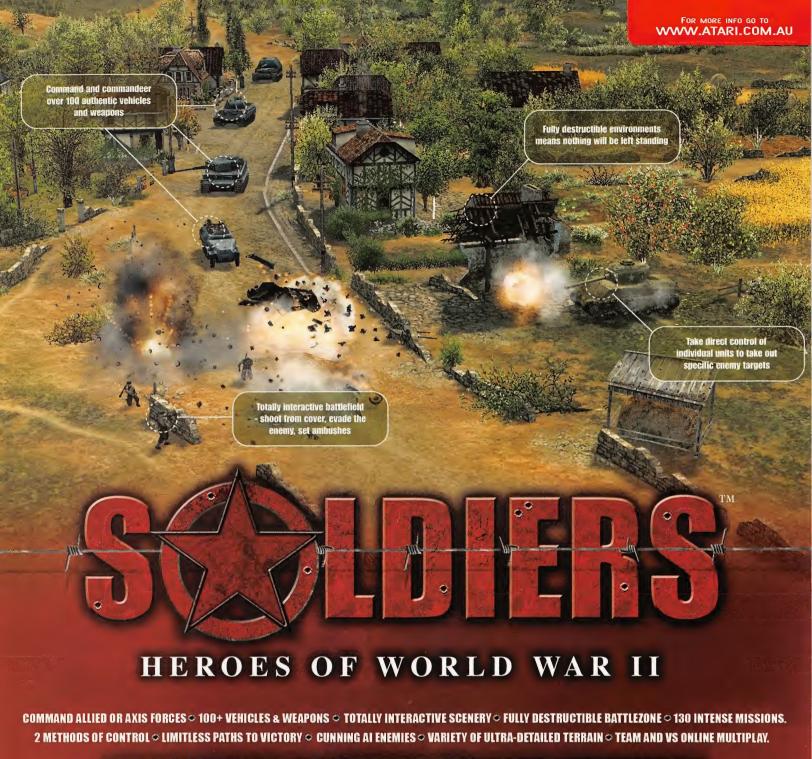
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# INBOX

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game (or to save us from chasing you up!), please include your full name and postal

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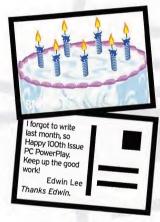
# HERDES

Atari is offering a free Heroes game to the author of every letter published in Inbox! This month's game is Operation Flashpoint.



One thing that I have failed to understand is the amount of "hype" surrounding the development of "Killer Graphics Cards" (PCPP #101).

For starters, Radeon 9800XT owners have bluntly found out that their beloved card is NOT supported by Battlefield Vietnam in anyway. In enabling features that contribute to the possibility of good graphics, Battlefield Vietnam freezes, crashes, glitches and basically



explodes into a horizontal plank of inferno that is suspended inside ones uber computer case.

In hindsight, why would anyone invest their cash into an expensive marketing tool, that hasnít been properly tested in game environment, causing instability, XP error code dialogue boxes \*shudders\* and a possible quarterly wait until a proper force ware driver is released, and thus causing suspension from that Jewel case that you have been drooling on as a mental reassurance that your computer is "gonna be okay".

Sure, the cards look spiffy and all, especially the quirky HSF, which is plastered with the company's advertising logos and brands, as well as the fun of cleaning the fan from dust that is protected by the plastic HS box, when the fan oscillates to a maximum level causing your uber-elite Raptor drives to reach 45 SECOND access file times. The Valve survey has backed up my point to a degree, as it shows that the majority of gamers are using GeForce4 MX which isnít exactly the most hardkore GPU seen to man. It is likely that when HL2 is released the survey results will change to a higher chipset, located up the temperature increasing ladder. Overall, the general consensus from gamers is: wait a while, do a bit of research and actually ask vourself "Do I really need this?"

**Brody Mulry** 

And on a similar note.

#### LITTLE SYSTEMS

After reading Stuart Calvin's Maximum Specs Tech Talk in PCPP#100, it's easy to agree with his ideas for a more logical take on the minimum spec system. Complaints of 'this game runs poorly' abound in the online communities, and it's more or less



because nobody turns the graphics options down to a mediocre level that reflects their mediocre system specs. People trying to get 60fps out of Far Cry or Singles on a Riva TNT2 are going to dismiss the game as rubbish because the square peg won't fit in the round hole. It's time for an upgrade, but the general public tries to treat PCs like consoles. News Flash, guys: the best gaming system isn't built by Dell, it's built by you (or your twenty-something geek relative).

The suggestion Stuart made was that in future there would be games made for the hardcore gamer with the \$9,998 computer system (before rice) that left the old tech for dead and embraced all the cool features that Nvidia and ATI say their

cards can perform but nobody has ever seen. But the trick is they've made a 'gamers only' game before it was called Ultima IX: Ascension. And it flopped because nobody could run it on their little systems. Stuart's idea of a niche market for those of us who are 'real' gamers with 'real' computer specs, while appealing and desirable, has been proven ineffective in

Roy Govier

The success of The Sims, Call of Duty, Counter-Strike and most Blizzard and Westwood games would also seem to support your argument.

# BUCKED THE CURRENT

Whaaat? You've got to be kidding, do you realise the enormous mistake vouíre making! This was my reaction to the news that LucasArts had stopped the production of Sam & Max 2. I, like many gamers over the age of 15, have fond memories of this game - one of the funniest adventure games ever - and was looking forward to the sequel, and the news that it had been 'pulled' shocked me. I thought LucasArts was a company that just made great games even if they bucked the current trend but I was wrong. I want to let everyone else out there who was disappointed with this decision know that there is currently a petition you can sign to let LucasArts know that we want this game! Just go to www.petitiononline.com/LA COSAM/petition.html and you can sign the electronic petition and leave a short message to let LucasArts know what you think of their descision. They currently have over 26000 signatures. so hopefully we can convince them not to listen to their accountants and release this game because I think there a much bigger market out there for this game than they realise!

Luke Thomas

Good luck.

#### SHINY COPY

I would like to know who were lucky gamers who managed to get their kevboard & mouse hands on the 100 free copies of Far Cry that PCPP generously gave away with their DVD edition of #100. My friends and I would like to... ahem, send 100 congratulations. I'm sure that even those of you who usually only buy the cheaper CD edition of the mag (like yours sincerely) would still have bought the DVD edition if there was a free shiny copy of Far Cry attached to it, right? What great strategic planning on behalf of PCPP to boost their DVD edition sales... By the way, are there any plans to ditch the CD edition altogether for just the DVD edition in the near

foreseeable future?
Vigilancer
There are no plans to ditch
the CD edition... at this
stage. PCPP was the first





mag in the world to have a monthly DVD and I expect we'll lead the way in dropping the CDs and moving to two monthly DVDs sometime in the future. Stay tuned.

#### INTELLIGENT HUMAN

I've been reading your magazine for about a year now. I enjoy pretty much everything it has to offer. I've especially taken a liking to the more humourous side of the magazine, particularly the Guerrilla Gamer, whose profanity never fails to get a chuckle or two out of me,



and the Yellow Boots section at the end of each

But in the May 2004 issue, which celebrated 8 years and 100 issues produced, I found the Yellow Boots to be simply pathetic. Look, who ever writes it should really pick up their act. There was really nothing in there about computers, games and only a small mention for the 100 issue thing. Parts were of it made the Guerrilla Gamer look like a calm, intelligent human being who really knows what heis on about. (No offence intended Guerrilla Gamer.) Personally I believe I could write a far greater piece of literature on gaming (PC and Console) given half a chance. If anyone out there (in Australia) would like to offer me this chance I would gladly take it up.

Will Joseph

Youire on!

#### **STALE OLD HYPER**

Aren't secondhand bookshops amazing? I was rummaging through my local one the other day and, to my surprise, I found hidden underneath a desk in the darkest, most ancient part of the building a pile of vintage PC PowerPlay magazines.

Sure, they were hidden underneath an equally large pile of stale old Hyper and PlayStation mags, but I wasn't going to let that stop me. The covers of the crappy console imposters grabbed and tore at me, begging for my attention, but I only had eyes for one mag. Finally, sporting numerous

paper cuts and a nasty bump from banging my head on the bottom of the desk, I escaped from the shop with fourteen issues, still smelling of the games of yesteryear. Out of this dangerous endeavour I managed to rescue issues 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 28, 29 from disappearing into obscurity. However, this is not the end of my journey. It may be a long time until my next message, but rest assured I will keep you abreast of my forays into the deepest and dankest corners of shops around the country on my search for elusive PC

PowerPlay magazines of old.

Aaron Cheater
I love the smell of old
PowerPlays in the morning.

#### CONSIDER Entering

Why do you tease us subscribers with all these awesome prizes that we can never win; a \$6000 Matrix PC, \$4000 Media Box, \$12000 Beast, etc. Maybe just maybe you might consider entering all subscribers into these competitions not just the new ones, and/or set up a monthly competition for existing subscribers. Just thought.

David Bradbury

Ok, this is something we're considering. Bear in mind, you can renew your subscription at any time - adding 6 or 13 issues to your current one - and be in the running to win that month's prize.

#### **RUIN THE DREAM**

I am writing this letter in response to 'Torture me' (PCPP #100). In this letter Sam Leslie complained that



the magazine was going downhill because of all the previews and stuff about upcoming games was replacing the reviews of current games. I would just like to say that I like reading the previews. I usually like

reading them more than the reviews because in the previews the games are bright with promise and the future looks golden. In reviews the faults are revealed and a lot of the time a game you thought was going to be great turns out crap. At the moment Half-Life 2 and Doom 3 are the glimmering lights of the future and all they hold is promise. Come review time they could turn out to have glaring flaws that ruin the dream of the game. I do like looking at what I could be playing now but I think the current ratio is good. Also as to PCPP's idea of reviewing games that haven't been released in Australia I say it is a bad idea. What is the point of reviewing games that we can't play yet? If they are to be imminently released in Australia fine, but if they may never be released here then what is the point of teasing us?

Rory Paltridge

Previews are obviously here to stay. And on a similar theme...

#### IT PUZZLES ME

To quote a reply to a letter in PCPP#100: "What we'll be doing in the future - thanks to our relation with gamesuniverse.com.au- is start reviewing games that don't actually get released here". Now I know this is well and good for filling up space in your excellent magazine. But it puzzles me. Imagine reading about a hella good game thatis just come out, only to find that you can't buy it here, it's only available in the US or UK or some other country. Ordering online and receiving it in 2-6 weeks instead of going to your nearest EB is pretty annoying. Michael Mancinone

I'm puzzled too. It's ridiculous that Australian gamers might miss out on City of Heroes (reviewed this issue) just because no one's putting it on the shelf of your nearest EB. Online retailers like Games Universe order in these games all the time-unless they're out of stock, you won't be waiting 2-6 weeks to get it.



## FROM THE FORUMS

Subject: Favourite Album This Week or Ever? Megadeth - Rust in Peace Cacophony, Counter Terrorist

Professor Longhair - Crawfish Fiesta Catweazle, Grandad

This week: Jurrasic 5, Power in Numbers Greatest Album Ever: Rage Against the Machine, Self Titled Mad\_Yugo, Dungeon Keeper

This week: Slipknot-Vol. 3: (The Subliminal Verses) Ever: System of a Down-Toxicity Colonel Chode, Guardian

Current - Hot Hot Heat - They only

Best Ever - The Clash ñ ANYTHING Hoiyes, Guardian

Current- Herzeleid, Rammstein All time- The Fat of the Land, The Prodigy 1337 hitman, Shambler

This week: incubus - A Crow Left of the Murder All time: Jeff Buckley ñ Grace Grezshnaw Turtledove, Dungeon Keeper

This week: Finger Eleven (selftitled) Ever: Something for Kate -Elsewhere for 8 Minutes Delirium, Avatar This week - Miles Davis- Kind of Blue All Time - The Beatles - Abbey Road Lankycheese, MIB

Best. Album. This week: Prince -Musicology Best. Album. Ever: Tool ñ Lateralus Darth Brutus, Tiefling

This week: Pavement "Slanted & Enchanted: Luxe & Reduxe" Ever: Duran Duran "Arena" David, Editor

To join in the discussion, swing by forums.networknext.com/pcpp

# olnsight Market of the second of the second



# **Consolidation**

#### Can you make a games console by sticking a PC in a box?

There were two very interesting new consoles on display at this year's E3, but Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo had nothing to do with them. No, Sega aren't getting back into the console business, so all you Sonic freaks can stop running around the room, screaming with glee. You see,

both of these consoles were simply off the shelf PCs in a box, and if you're anything like us, you're probably just a tad sceptical about whether or not these can succeed, especially when we take a look at who is making these machines. Let's take a closer look...

#### Infinium Labs Phantom

A better name for this console should have been The Defamator. There are so many lawsuits over this sucker that it's hard to see the hardware behind all the lawyers. The cause of these were some rather aggressive online reports about the guy behind Infinium labs, who didn't take too kindly to this. After reading these reports, many were ready to dismiss the Phantom as just another pipedream. But then two very big things happened. Kevin Bachus, who was one of the head honchos behind the Xbox, came on board to help launch the Phantom, resulting in an instant credibility boost for Infinium Labs. And then there was the Phantom booth at E3. Considering we were all expecting a dodgy little stand down in Kentia Hall, manned by a bunch of ex-car salesmen and a few transvestite booth babes, it was hard not to be impressed by the real booth. This cubic oasis was large enough to make it obvious that a wad of cash had been pumped into the display, and amazingly enough there were several demonstration units set up and running. And this time they actually had hardware in the box, rather than being the empty shell seen in the past.

We have to say that the console exterior has a very sexy design, one that is very reminiscent of Apple stylings - probably due to the highly polished white casing. The coolest touch is the blue LED that

signifies the console on, which pulses like a heartbeat. Very high tech eh? We were lucky enough to see a demonstration of UT2K4 running on a Phantom console, which was plugged into a big assed Plasma screen. Surprisingly enough, it looked like much of the eye candy was cranked up, and yet it appeared to be running quite smoothly. Having said that, it doesn't take much of a system to get UT2K4 to run well... We were also privy to a demonstration of the on-demand feature of the Phantom. The revolutionary thing about Phantom isn't the fact that it's just a PC in a box it's the software distribution model. Instead of going to your local EB, you'll be able to buy and download all of your









## **TECH SPECS**

#### **APEXTREME**

CPU: AMD Athlon XP 2000+ Motherboard chipset: NVIDIA nForce2

Memory: 256MB DDR-RAM
Graphics chipset: NVIDIA nForce2
IGP

Sound chipset: NVIDIA nForce2 5.1 channel integrated Hard drive: 40GB

Connectivity: Ethernet and 56k v.92 modem

#### **PHANTOM**

CPU: AMD Athlon XP 2500+ Motherboard chipset: NVIDIA nForce2 Ultra Memory: 256MB DDR-SDRAM

Memory: 256MB DDR-SDRAM
Graphics chipset: NVIDIA
GeForceFX 5700 Ultra
Sound chipset: NVIDIA nForce2
Ultra 5.1 channel integrated
Hard drive: 40GB

**Connectivity:** Ethernet



games online. You'll even be able to rent the games before purchasing them. The interface to do this looked spiffy enough, and even had links to game reviews of each software title on offer.

There's one problem with this though we've got no doubt whatsoever that
within a month of Phantom being
released, the copy protection built into
this system will have been cracked,
broken and left lying on the side of the
information superhighway like so much
roadkill. It also means you're going to
need a relatively fast Internet connection
to be able to download your games in a
timely manner. Thankfully these are very
common in Australia. Or not.
Still, after having such low expectations
we were moderately impressed by

Phantom. But is it going to threaten the likes of Xbox, PS2, Gamecube and our beloved PC? Not a chance in hell...

#### **ApeXtreme**

If the Phantom booth was a hive of activity that reflected a hefty investment of cash, the ApeXtreme booth was the exact opposite. God it was sad. It consisted of three or four of the units standing on pedestals, hooked up to crappy TVs, without a single soul demonstrating the units. It's no exaggeration to say that this booth would have seemed more at home in a ghost town than the hectic hustle and bustle of E3. Where were the booth babes just begging to be photographed? There

wasn't even a single PR guy in sight, ready to ram a hundred different reasons why his product was the best down our throat. It was a truly atrocious display of poor marketing. But how did the games look?

So bloody terrible that our memory has blocked them out. We \*think\* that we might have seen UT2K4 running, but it was at such a low resolution and frame rate that it was hard to tell. There was also a car racing game running, but the only racing to be seen was us, away from this abominable piece of crap. If the demo of the ApeXtreme is anything to go by, we've got massive doubts that this sloth in a box is even going to see release.

**Bennett Ring** 

# **Dual Wield**

#### Two tickets on the upgrade carousel please

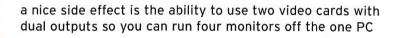
ust when you thought PC gaming couldn't become any more expensive, Alienware's E3 announcement will have you reaching into Daddy's trust fund once again. But if you can afford it, you're going to have frame rates that even the renderers at Pixar would be envious of. The technology that Alienware unveiled to unbelieving gamers is simply called "Alienware's Video Array", and it should theoretically double the graphics processing power of your system. How

does it do this? Simple - it allows you to run TWO is the board that we'll see in the last half of this year. This motherboard is based upon Intel's Tumwater chipset, and will only be available in Alienware's pricey ALX systems. Unfortunately these systems aren't sold in Australia, but we're sure there will be a way to purchase the system online. The concept behind the Visual Array sounds relatively simple. Alienware's software splits one scene into two parts the top half of the screen, and the bottom half of the screen. Each of the two video cards is then given one of these parts to work on, and their output is combined to create the entire screen. The joining of the two halves takes place in hardware, within Alienware's Video Merger Hub. If

be installing two high end cards into the system.

The Video Array is designed to be compatible with off the shelf video cards, and specialised drivers won't be necessary. This means that it should remain compatible with future video cards. A nice side effect of this technology is the ability to use two video cards with dual outputs, giving the user the ability to run four monitors off the one PC. Everybody's got four spare monitors lying around the house, don't they?

According to Alienware, PCI Express does not easily allow this technique to be utilised, but we've got doubts about this claim. Compared to the likes of VIA and



video cards off the one motherboard. We told you it was going to be expensive... The Video Array system has been in development for quite some time, dating back to 2001 when the company came up with the concept of running 2 AGP cards together in one system. A working prototype of this technique was demonstrated in 2003, but at this stage PCI Express was starting to make its mark. Considering the extra bandwidth offered by PCI Express, it was no surprise to see Alienware move the technology over to the PCI Express bus. The first PCI Express board with the Video Array technology was created at the end of 2003, named the X2, and this

the Alienware software detects that one half of the screen has a higher workload than the other, it redistributes the workload more evenly. It is expected that this technique will result in at least a 50% increase in performance, and possibly even more so in games that are heavily GPU bottlenecked. For the Video Array to function correctly, both video cards need to be totally identical, right down to the manufacturer. We're guessing that even the video card BIOS will need to be identical, so if you're unfamiliar with video card BIOS flashing, it might be wise to purchase both of the video cards at the same time. It'll be interesting to see how two mid level cards, such as a pair of RADEON 9800XTs or GeForce 5950s, compare to a single high end card like the X800XT. It could even be that you'll get better performance from the two mid level cards at a price that is cheaper than the high end card. However, we've got a feeling that if you've got enough cash to afford this extreme system, chances are you'll

SiS, Alienware is a tiny corporation, so it shouldn't take long for the big players to come out with their own competing solutions. Hopefully we'll have some news about this once we get back from Computex 2004.

For those of you who will never be able to afford such an indulgent system, and that's the majority of us, we can only hope that game designers don't start developing their games with these kinds of performance levels in mind. However, Alienware is discussing with several game designers the possibility of including special settings within game graphic engines to make the most of the extreme power offered by the Video Array. It wasn't that long ago that 3dfx had a similar solution in its SLI mode, which allowed two of its Voodoo 2 cards to be run in parallel. Unfortunately it was simply too expensive for the majority of gamers, and we're pretty sure that the same is going to be true of Alienware's dual video card systems.

**Bennett Ring** 

# **ALTEC LANSING SPEAKERS**

If you're looking to cause permanent hearing damage, aggravate your quiet neighbours or scare the hell out of your pets, a good set of PC speakers should do the trick. Altec Lansing is a brand synonymous with high quality speakers, so we're more than happy to give away three sets from its new range. We've already given you the chance to win the 4121s and the 5021s, so this time it's the turn of the high-end 6021 set valued at \$399. Props to Innovision www.innovision.com.au - for supplying such a cool prize.

To enter the competition, simply answer the following question on the back of an envelope:

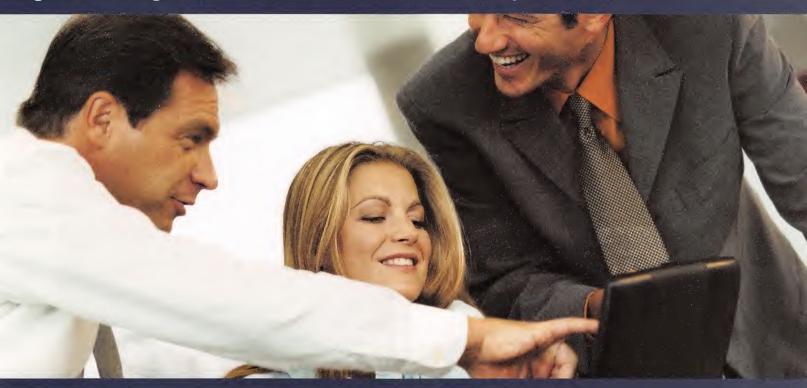
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# THE BIG QUIZ

#### THE WINNER AND ALL THE ANSWERS REVEALED

or our 100th issue we ran a "super exciting" quiz, cunningly titled The For our 100th issue we ran a super exciting quiz, common, many Big Quiz, in an effort to not only find Australia's Smartest Gamer but reward him or her with a stunningly cool new videocard from ATI and HIS. We can now reveal that Alex Cullinan from Victoria (aka frosty theaussie) scored a spectacular 100% in the geek test - he also got bonus points for demonstrating the extent of his research into some of the trickier questions. Congratulations, Alex, you are officially Australia's Smartest Gamer!

For everyone else, here's a rundown of all the answers. Tally up your points and see how you did!



Are you Australia's smårtest gamer?

Take our hardcore test to find out



If you are, you'll win ATI's hot new high end videocard, which is around twice as fast as a 9800. Yowsers. Heil, it's so hot we don't even know what it's called yet. Thanks to HIS and ATI for coming through with the good stuff.

#### CHARACTERS

Twinsen's Odyssey, The Sims (console version), Wolfenstein 3D, Mafia, Commander Keen:

#### DIFFICULTY LEVELS

A - Civ III; B - Deus Ex; E - Duke 3D: C - Quake 3: D - Thief

#### DATES

1995 - Phantasmagoria; 1999 -Planescape Torment; 1987 Police Quest; 1998 - Powerslide; 1990 - Prince of Persia

#### NUMBERS

93 - Age of Empires, 64 -Daikatana, 92 - Ghost Recon, 92 -Rogue Spear, 86 - Sim Golf, 81 -Soul Reaver, 92 - Starcraft, 90 (or Annihilation, 96 - Zork

#### **DEVELOPERS**

Pandemic - Army Men RTS; 3D Realms (or Remedy) - Death Rally; Ion Storm - Dominion; Looking Glass - Flight Unlimited 3; Westwood -Lands of Lore; Shiny - MDK; Core -Project Eden; Bioware - Shattered Steel; Raven - Take No Prisoners; Buka (or KD Lab) - Vangers

Brian Reynolds - Big Huge Games; Bruce Shelley - Ensemble; Ed Del Castillo - Liquid; Gabe Newell -Valve; George Broussard - 3D Realms; Peter Molyneux Lionhead; Ray Muzyka - Bioware; Sam Houser - Rockstar; Tim Cain -Troika; Warren Spector - Ion Storm

Big F\*\*\*ing Gun; First Person Shooter; Grand Theft Auto; Head Up Display; Krush, Kill N Destroy; Lock On: Modern Air Combat; Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game; Non Player Character; Player Versus Player; Real Time Strategy

#### OUOTES

Baldur's Gate; Planescape:

Torment; System Shock 2; Freedom Force; Half-Life; Grand Theft Auto 3; Baldur's Gate; Duke Nukem 3D; The Secret of Monkey Island; Halo

#### WORLDS

Baldur's Gate 2; Ultima (various); King's Quest (series); Grand Theft Auto 1 & 3; Republic: the Revolution; Omikron: The Nomad Longest Journey; Thief; Half-Life

#### **SCREENSHOTS**

Space Quest; Blood 2; Diablo: 2; TOCA Touring Cars; Lode

#### HARDWARE

Arctic Silver - Thermal Paste: DigiDice - Mini PC; FX-53 - CPU; External cooling kit; Mouse Bungee - Mouse cable holder; Mouse Skatez - Teflon tape; Raptor - Hard Drive; Thrustmaster Cougar - Joystick; Vapochill - Case with integrated cooling unit

#### **ENGINEERING**

Aurora; No One Lives Forever -Lithtech; Shadow Warrior - Build; Sin - Quake; System Shock 2 -Dark; Terminator SkyNet -

#### **DECRYPT**

Digital Subscriber Line Access Component Interconnect; Industry Standard Architecture; American Standard Code for Information Interchange; Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line; Basic Input Output Accelerated Graphics Port; World Wide Web; Double Data Rate Synchronous Dynamic Random Access Memory

# **President Forever**

■ Developer: Eighty Dimensional Software ■ Genre: Strategy ■ URL: http://www.presidentforever.com

If like me you've spent last five months preparing for a solo roller-blading attempt on Mt Everest you're probably unaware that it's an election year in the US and most likely right here in our own country as well. To most of us politics is something we only think about once every couple of years when it's time to vote or when the people next door decide to renovate their house by adding a goat farm. Politics can be fun to watch when there's a good stoush on, and that is basically what President Forever is all about. It ignores all the boring bits in between and focuses on the election process

pitting you against the game's Al in a fight to win the hearts and minds of American voters. President Forever is so detailed that it almost qualifies as being a political simulation. However the Al lets the game down a little in this respect as it is significantly more sensible than most voters and cannot be easily swaved by tales of refugee children thrown off boats or swarthy gang members interfering with white women. Anthony Burgoyne is the main man behind this project and proof that you don't need to spend years working on a game, even if you're team consists of only two people. President Forever was coded in just





## **ACTIVISION ODYSSEY**

Fear and Roming in Las Vegas

I was a man on a mission: to get the goods on Activision's line up of games for E3 and beyond. After about 24 hours spent in the air or in airports, I touched down in sunny Los Vegas. Soon I was trying to buy a ticket for a shuttle to my hotel. Right as I reached the window, the woman inside loudly declared that she quit. I carefully enquired if she could quit after my ticket and, with a little sugar, I had a piece of paper in my hand and she got to yell, "I quit," again.

After many other misadventures the shuttle finally pulled up in front of the massive edifice of Caesar's Palace. Where else would you demo Rome: Total War?

The place was solid marble and as warm as that sounds. As befits the life of a games journalist I had an overdue story to finish. Since the hotel charged \$US1 per minute to use their internet I ended up in a friendly Apple store happily typing away in a nearby mall while I waited for the official 6:30pm dinner and my first contact with Activision on the star-spangled side of the Pacific.

Dinner was a lavish affair of strange little entrees, red lighting and booze. If you ever wonder why an article is a bit wonky, it's probably because the journo's just been out with PR people. The kids were all still partying on at 11pm when I headed off to take some pictures of Vegas in all its neon glory.

The next day the whole world looked a little less sparkly as 30 of us scrabbled

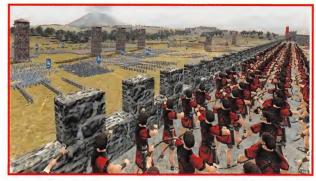
over Activision breakfast danishes, but once we were lead into the Rome demo room all grumbling vanished. There were rows of machines set up and a big screen from the presentation. Michael De Plater almost apologised after starting the Rome presentation with the word "epic". When we got down to playing we realised that he shouldn't have bothered. Epic it was.

One of the US guys and myself were kicking miscellaneous GameSpy and IGN butt until one of the devs jumped in and we saw, first-hand, just how tactical Rome can be. On the huge maps we were shown how a flanking move becomes a trap, and then how out-flanking the trap left us weak down the middle. It was awesome.

Soon we were rushed on to a plane and onto more "get to know you" drinks in Santa Monica. A couple of new Aussie accents made me feel better but, by this point, the only thing I wanted to feel was a mattress. Finally, with no little stealth, I managed to get quite well acquainted with my downy new friend.

The next day was the big one. From 10 am we sat in a little conference room and watched demos for X-Men Legends, Shark's Tale, Rome: Total War, Doom 3 on the Xbox, Call of Duty: United Offensive and Vampire Bloodlines.

A few hours and some lunch later we were on tables getting a chance to ask the developers our questions in groups. I overheard a Greek journo straight-out ask



the Vampire guys why their game looked so bad. He was a charmer and, just for the record, Vampire is the best looking RPG I've ever seen. It's no HL2 but the animations are sleek and the characters are fantastic. Fat Larry, in his basketball top, blew us away with his hip-hop meets fast-talking used car salesman routine.

We also watched as a Gargoyle tried to reach a player on a balcony by batting down the supports and bringing down the house. The physics alone make Vampire move like no other RPG, and boy, it's fast.

All that left was the Spider-man 2 party, in a warehouse surprising close to South Central LA, and a trip out to see the game the next day. In the first free hours I'd had in days Venice Beach called. By 10pm not only had I been stood up by valley girls, but I was safely checked back into the airport and homeward-bound, with acute sleep deprivation and a full notebook.

Timothy C. Best



## **DRINKING IN LA**

On the second night in Santa Monica, after we escaped South Central, we all celebrated by checking out LA's night-life. About 20 games journalists ended in a little place called the Circle Bar, where we stuck to the floors, danced to 80s music (including AC/DC) and the bar girl had more silicon under her bra than all of us had in our PCs combined. As I'm standing there, bobbing to some odd classic, a guy walks up to me and asks if I know where to find any "extracurricular" activities. Apparently, out of everyone in the genuine LA bar yours-truly looks the most like a pimp-daddy. Mumma would be proud.



four months of full-time work, thanks to the financial success of an earlier title President 2000. We managed to drag Anthony away from all the mud wrestling and champagne that usually goes hand in hand with the games industry at E3 time to answer a few questions for us.

#### How much research was involved in making president forever?

Between myself and one other person, we read approximately 20 books on presidential elections. You find out that the experts disagree on a lot of things, and so you have some discretion when deciding exactly how much certain things affect the outcome of elections.

Are their any plans to make an online capable version so that players can compete with other people? Yes, President Forever was designed with networking in mind, and the next major upgrade will feature networking (which should be out in several months).

Is the game moddable to simulate other kinds of democratic systems such as a parliamentary system? Not quite, but the next project being worked on here at Eighty Dimensional is called Prime Minister Forever, which features a parliamentary mode!

#### What are your all time favourite games?

For sheer simplicity of game play, Empire and Space Wars (which were also the first computer games I can remember playing - on my family's 4.77 MHz xt). Those aside, if I had to rank computer games my top three would have to be Nobunaga's Ambition II (a game about the 16th century Japanese feudal system), Star Control 2, and The Secret of Monkey Island.

# **UNREALITY CUBED**

Epic sure has come a long way from those pinball games...

nreal 3.0 developer Epic has come up with a crazy idea: since the next version of their popular FPS won't be coming out until 2006, why not design it for the kind of PC that will be available in 2006? To this end, you can forget about running U3 on your pitiful 3.2GHz system with its miserable 256MB graphics card. We're talking a gig of video memory and a processor with a 4 or maybe even a 5 somewhere in its name.

It sounds insane now, but consider that in 2006 a 4GHz system and a Radeon Whatever with 1GB of memory will probably cost slightly less than your thrashin' P4 3.0 and Radeon 9800XT did at the beginning of this year. Have faith - you will be ready for Unreal 3.0. But maybe start putting a little bit of the paycheque in a high interest account now, just to be certain.

the in-game version which is usually about 10,000 polygons. So we get the lighting detail of the full high polygon mesh baked down into a normal map that gets rendered ingame on a low polygon mesh," he says.

In other words, the characters running around on screen don't have that many more polygons than the characters in UT2004, but they are covered in a 'skin' of extremely high detail. The results are little short of spectacular, although it's a shame Epic has so far only shown us hideous pustulant monster beasts instead of funky battle chicks.

The developer is also taking its signature ragdoll physics system to the next level. In UT2003 and UT2004, a character runs around according to a set of preprogrammed animations and then when shot, turned into a ragdoll and the physics system took over from there.

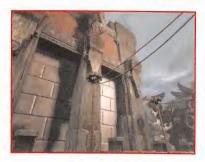
Sweeney says now the engine can move character models in and out of physics-based animation. "If a player gets shot in the arm it will go flying back, but then he will recover and continue animating on," he says. We can expect to see similar effects such as huge explosions tossing live players around like dolls, bouncing off terrain and architecture only to fall, jump up, and keep fighting.

"There'll also be more integration between hand created animation, physics animation and procedural animation. Nowadays, all our joints have a breaking-strength in them. So if you actually shoot a character's arm with enough force it will break his arm off. You can pull arms or body parts off characters. It has some sick possibilities, but you can do it," savs Sweenev.

Epic is opening up the field of possibility to developers using the U3 engine. Everything, the developer hopes, will be possible. Mechs? No problem. Underwater fun with correct sound dampening and distortion? Easy. Doppler shift on fastmoving objects? You got it.

Just make sure you also have the hardware to run it. 2006 people. Start saving now

**Anthony Fordham** 











#### You're nuts!

One of Epic's stated aims with the new engine is to allow artists to create objects in Maya or 3D Studio Max and then see them running around killing things in-game with no appreciable drop in detail.

According to Epic egghead Tim Sweeney, the trick is to build two versions of every model in the game. "We build a source model with several million polygons, about two to six million, and we use that model for all the lighting detail on the mesh. Then we go to



# With Timothy C. Best

The big news on the comings and goings front is that LucasArts has finally decided to appoint a new president after having a 'position vacant' sign on the corner office for the more than six months. The job has gone to the Vice President of Marketing and Distribution at Lucasfilm, Jim Ward, giving him a second hat. It's a bit worrying that the LucasArts president is a marketing guy pulling double duty. A pessimist might read that as sign that LucasArts is moving towards just producing safe Star Wars tie-ins.

On the goings front we have Papyrus and Impressions. Both studios have been shut down as Vivendi tightens its massive belt. Racing specialist, Papyrus, is best known for Grand Prix Legends and its phenomenal NASCAR series while Impressions brought us Zeus, Cieopatra, Lords of the Reaim III and Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom. You'li notice that both studios produced games that made our Top 100 (in Grand Prix Legends and Zeus) which makes the ciosures more of a pity, especially

since the big V's gaming bottom line is bound to look a lot sexier after World of WarCraft and Haif-Life 2. Oh well

As these studios leave us, a brand new studio in Queensland joins the game. Kalescent is currently working on an Xbox demo called Urban Brawl - if you think Roller Ball or Blood Bowl then you're on the right page - and, after scoping out the crew's bios, we hope to see them leap into the PC world soon.

Finally, the former head of Capcom in North America, Bill Gardner, has founded a new games publisher called 0~3 Entertainment. New game developers pop up from time to time but new publishers are something of a rarity because of the cash required to get games out there. Another publisher can only be a good thing as far as I'm concerned because each new addition equals another shot at getting my super-model mecha game funded.

The Ultimate Visual Experience

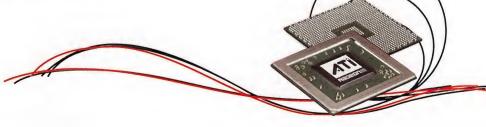


# Radeonx

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# **PacManhattan**

Our Yellow Hero out on the Streets

LET'S GET THEORETICAL PacManhattan might seem like a bit of a lark but you have to admit it's a pretty cool way to explore what makes for good game design. The team behind this project decided that to see what made for a good game they'd have to take one apart to see what made it tick. What better way to do that then to break it down and re-create it in a new environment to see just where the fun generators lie?

dozen students have recreated Pac-Man in the streets of Manhattan, using the rectangular street layout, and their class time, to good effect. There are even ghost costumes and someone who straps on a little yellow disk with a wedge cut out for chomping.

There's something so powerful about this combination of retro chic, outright geekiness and creative use of study time that has captured the imagination of people around the world. PacManhattan has been covered in everything from papers like the New York Sun to BBC Radio Scotland and even CNN.

The whole project has spun from a single games design class that is a part of the Art and Technology graduate program at New York Univeristy. Apparently, this is what happens when you set a team of uni students the task of analysing what

makes a good game. First-year student of Interactive Telecommunications Peter Vigeant says they didn't set out to make a tribute.

"We saw a game that worked and wanted to transfer it to another medium. Advanced game

design is ridiculously difficult - especially when you only have four weeks - so instead of trying to come up with a new formula that may not be successful, the team looked at something that was incredibly successful and asked the question, 'why?'

After pinning down the basics that made Pacman a great game, the team just scaled things up and added running shoes. Vigeant even reckons their version is an improvement on the original.

He says that, "The greatest breakthrough on the game is the information sharing over cell phones: the ghost 'generals' sit in a room and strategise while telling their particular ghost where to go on the grid - even though the actual ghosts make their own decisions normally- and Pacman's general is in charge of making sure that Pacman knows when ghosts are near and what paths are the best to take ...

The strategy element is amazing much greater than other traditional tag variations such as capture the flag mostly because the constant

application, which you update manually as phone calls come in, that keeps track of how many dots players have managed to eat and everyone's relative positions.

All of this is proving to be more than just a theoretical assignment and the players seem to be having too much fun just to chalk it up to science. PacManhattan seems to be growing.

"I always thought of this game as a mix of theatre and sports - as Pacman appears to be Pacman - and is assuming the role of Pacman, even though it's

after pinning down the basics that made Pacman a great game, the team just scaled things up and added running shoes

communication with a control centre."

Interestingly enough, it was the very notion of using cell phones that was the toughest part of making the whole project fly. Being in the information age the students all had wild fancies of GPS systems, hacked phones and digital hookups, which ate two weeks worth of planning. It wasn't until the teacher told them just to get on with the game, and they decided just to use phones and pennies on a map, that everything just clicked. Since the first play tests the game has evolved and now there's a little

really some grad student trying to win... I don't know many sports that involve that fantasy aspect, which makes this very appealing," says Vigeant.

"We did take a videogame, but the actual experience is very un-videogame like. It would be the same if we took bowling and make the pins people and the ball a guy in a suit.

For all the latest information on this academically sanctioned tom-foolery, not to mention the high-score list, check out www.pacmanhattan.com.

**Timothy C. Best** 





No single genre has produced more vapourware (if I can put it like that) than the Massively Multiplayer Online RPG. Every year a score of these things are announced, they get a cursory 300 words in PCPP and then they sink without a trace. Wherefore Priest? Whither that German thing with the blue spiders? Who can say?

What the Curtain can say is that the average never-to-bereleased MMORPG is a crazy kettle of whack, and Auto Assault upholds the tradition with style. It appears that developer NetDevil thinks the main thing wrong with EverQuest is the lack of armoured cars that can turn into mechs and stomp mobs and

Auto Assault addresses this admirably, since the game is indeed a crazy mix of Transformers, Quarantine (remember that one folks?) and Carmageddon. Check this out for an original concept: it's a post-apocalyptic world and people must arm their cars with outlandish weaponry and fight for survival. If only George Miller had thought of that when he made Mad Max. The game intends to eschew all that distracting crap you find in most MMORPGs such as levelling up, meaningful NPC interactions and quests, and instead focus on lots and lots of explosions.

Who? NetDevil

What? Auto Assault

Why? Giant cars are eating my brain!

The environment will be highly destructible; although everything you blow up will respawn shortly afterward so that there'll be something for the next player to blow up when they log in. Monsters will attack the player's car in wave upon wave of unpleasantness, but all the player will have to do is wash their "cone of death" across the opponent and a devilish system of "virtual dice rolls" will determine whether or not the monster will, like everything else, explode.

Odds on Auto Assault ever being released currently stand at 50 to 1 against, but who knows. Maybe one day it will appear on shelves, and we can all stand together, read the back and go "WTF?"





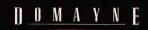












Harvey Norman





Titles include: Contract J.A.C.K – MA15+, Warcraft III – G8+, Lords of the Realm III – G8+, Counter–Strike Condition Zero – MA15+, Half Life Platinum – MA15+ (Pack Includes Half Life Opposing Force, Tam fortress Classic, Counter–Strike and Blue Shift).



# **BACKYARD BLITZ**

Indie developers stickin' it up to the Man...

hile E3 is certainly the biggest event of the game industry calendar it is certainly not the only one. As E3 was wrapping up on the other side of the world Melbourne played host to the first year of Free Play; an independent game developers conference setup as part





of the Victorian government's Next Wave arts festival. The purpose of the conference was for game developers and those in related fields to have a forum in which to discuss the various aspects of their work and to provide support for this burgeoning industry.

Taking place in several crowded rooms atop of three flights of disconcertingly hollow sounding stairs in a building of dubious structural integrity, the Independent Game Developers Conference was filled with a buzz of excitement and enthusiasm. These were people who loved games and wanted to make them - simple as that - and this conference was their opportunity to share their enthusiasm and love of the craft. Option 2 was the buzz was simply a result of the conveniently placed bar which had plenty of beer on tap; a piece of good fortune marred slightly by their insistence of serving ale in plastic cups.

Despite the development focus it was not just current and aspiring developers who were doing the rounds at the IGDC. A wide variety of people with varying connections to the games industry were in attendance. Games publishers, artists, journalists, gaming fans and the occasional curious onlooker could all be seen amongst the throngs of people gathered. Likewise the topics of discussion varied greatly, ensuring that no matter what your interest in the industry, there would be at least one demonstration or panel discussion that would be worthwhile.

The conference effectively consisted of technical workshops and lectures, demonstrations of some of the great 'garage work' that is going on at the moment and panel discussions.

While the technical aspects of the conference were all worthwhile, it was the lively panel discussions and keynote speeches that provided the 'meat' of the conference for attendees who didn't have the next Deus Ex brewing in their basement. The panel discussions provided certainly the most interactive element of the conference and provided some very meaty food for thought on varying game related topics from sex in games to the role of business models in game development.

While this was the Independent Game Developers Conference that does not mean there were no high profile names around. Perhaps the biggest draw card for the show was Harvey Smith, lead designer on Deus Ex, who delivered a more philosophical keynote speech on game development. But there were others too; Brody Condon, the man behind the controversial FPS/Artistic experience Waco Resurrection, and even our/Hyper's own Daniel Wilks were there to have a chat with the gathered crowd.

Perhaps the most depressing thing about the conference is that there seems to be this groundswell of belief that independent inherently equals good and commercial can only be equated with bad. Despite pleas from certain speakers that the role of independent game development is to fill the niches that are not profitable for the large publishers there seems to be a long way to go before the notion of independent game development being able to co-exist alongside commercial games development is an acceptable mantra.

Ultimately, this was the first IGDC and was a little rough around the edges. However I must refer back to my initial 'buzz' sensation, the independent game development community is strong and it is thriving, to give the backyard developers access to a voice like this conference provides can only mean good things for our industry as a whole.

**Nathan Cocks** 



#### THE REST CAME YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

## **#6 COMBAT MISSION: BEYOND OVERLORD**

Turn based tactical warfare in good ole WW2, command units of soldiers and vehicles to acheive your objectives within the turn limit. Sounds simple and straight forward enough, but add in realistic ballistics, realistic weaponry, excellent morale modelling, terrain that has actual tactical uses and the game becomes a tacticians dream. Plan your actions then hit the end button and for the next 60 seconds watch the realtime rendering of you and your enemies movements and howl with joy/rage as thye unfold. Then sit back and plan the next turn all the while laughing at those who think RTS is the height of strategy gaming.

Mr Nigel Paton-Jurak

Do you have a favourite obscure game? Send your 100 word submissions to letters@pcpowerplay.com.au with the game title in the subject line.









All the bits that we cram in at the last moment with Anthony Fordham

#### NU DRIVE NEXT

Price: \$150 Distributor: PC Case Gear Contact: www.pccasegear.com.au



've had a few USB pen drives over the last few years, and the biggest problem I have is remembering to whip them out of the pocket of my board shorts whenever I plunge all glistening and muscled into the mighty Pacific ocean (\*cough\*). Finally, there's a product for surfer geeks the world over: the Nu Drive Next.

It's blue and yellow and slightly rubbery, which is the universal livery for 'sport' consumer electronics. Sport in this case means not only being able to cop a bit of spray, but also survive being made into some kind of weird martini, as this photograph suggests.

It's a 256MB drive so there's plenty of room for all your sensitive information, it runs the USB 2.0 interface so you don't have to sit around waiting for it to upload. There's even an LED to flash on and off and make you feel like you've got at least one friend in this cruel, heartless world. And what's more, he's waterproof.

### SONY CLIE PEGTH55G

Price: \$799 Distributor: Sony Contact: www.sony.com.au

'm going to assume that you've downloaded all 上 available preview images of the PlayStation Portable and gone: "Dunno about the games, but that is one seriously nice looking piece of kit.

If you need black, sleek, slightly shiny tech with a Sony logo on it right now, you should reach for the Clie PEGTH55G. It's black. It has a sheet of perspex or transparent aluminum or something across the screen. It has a built-in video recorder and since it runs Palm OS 5.21 there's plenty of groovy games for it.

It also has WiFi built in, although it's the slightly older 802.11b format, so only a maximum of 11Mb/sec for you. I guess we just can't have it all.

And at \$799, it's probably cheaper than the PSP will be







hate vacuuming. Who doesn't? Back bent, walkman turned up to an earshattering volume, dust in your mouth and all your pets barking, screeching or bubbling (I keep fish) at the noise. Wouldn't it be great if some kind of little lozenge shaped robot could do it all for you?

Thankfully, various manufacturers have created robot vacuum cleaners, but only Roomba seems to be selling them for about the price of a higher-end canister vac. Roomba trundles about your house bumping into walls with his "non

marring bumper" until his internal navigation system tells him he's covered the whole room, whereupon he'll beep to be picked up, emptied out and hung on the wall.

Roomba is just another in the first generation of mindless robot slaves who will be the first liberated when our society crumbles into Will Smith's I Robot style anarchy in about fifty years. But until that day, work him like a bastard, and even though his positronic descendents may then burn your house down, at least the floors will be clean.

## **USB SWISS ARMY KNIFE**

Price: \$100 Distributor: Think Geek Contact: www.thinkgeek.com

h yeah, as if this nifty creature wasn't going to get in Hotware the second it poked its groovy, multipurpose head into the public sphere. It's the ultimate in Old Geek tech married to the ultimate in New Geek tech! It's an official, proper Swiss Army Knife with a 64MB flash drive instead of the little pointy thing for getting stones out of horses' hooves. There's also a bright red LED flashlight which doubles as the read/write indicator when the drive is plugged into either your redoubtable PC or the mainframe of the

international criminal mastermind whose mountain fortress vou've just broken into using some of the other attachments on your knife.

There's also a ballpoint pen, for signing autographs when people inevitably stop you in the street to admire how unutterably cool you are. Go geeks!

# MIDAS REMOTE CONTROL WATCH

Price: \$60 Distributor: Think Geek
Contact: www.thinkgeek.com

There's nothing more irritating than having to check your watch to see how long it is before the next episode of Futurama, and then having to actually reach forward onto the coffee table to pick up your universal remote and switch from home cinema mode back to normal free-to-air TV.

Thankfully, the folk at Midas have realised that all this pain and suffering can be avoided by simply combining the remote and watch into one all-conquering device.

Strap this to your wrist and you will have The Power. The power, that is, to remotely control infra-red TVs from a



wide range of manufacturers, as well as some set top cable and satellite units

The company advocates going to "sports bars" and randomly flicking the bar's TV through different channels as a way to make new friends really quickly. PCPP advocates having comprehensive health insurance if you intend to try this, especially on Origin nights. Oddly enough, the watch itself is analogue. Which is a bummer for me, because while I'm flicking channels on my DLP rear-projection TV, I'm also trying to

remember what the little hand means...

## SANYO XACTI VPC-J4



Price: \$599 Distributor: Sanyo Contact: www.Sanyo.com

S anyo wants you to ask the question "when does yesterday's look become funky and retro?" The new Xacti VPC-J4 is retro in the sense that it looks like a point and shoot camera from the mid 90s. But deep within the tacky exterior beats the heart of a 4 megapixel monster. It's got all the mod cons: Li-Ion battery, 30 FPS video capacity, real time interpolation up to 8 megapixel, a little robot voice that tells you

how to work all the more complicated controls, and a useful little option that makes the camera take properly formatted passport photos.

It may not be your kind of retro, but alternate 'retro' digitals cost upwards of \$1000 and are aimed at the ultra-hardcore photographer. Sanyo's given us something for the clubbers and pubbers of this world, and for that we salute them.

#### TRIUMPH DAYTONA

Price: \$15800 Distributor: Triumph Contact: www.triumph.co.uk

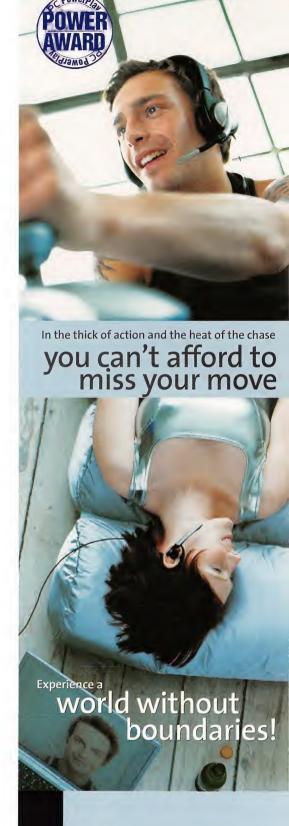
There's something about a motorbike that just screams "I am really comfortable with the size of my penis." Triumph is a British manufacturer made famous by Lawrence of Arabia, who survived one of the most brutal desert campaigns ever to come home and spear off the road into a tree when riding a Triumph bike. After the war the company eventually



managed to gain a distinctly British reputation for making bikes that didn't really work very well but were somehow better because of it.

The Daytona is a bike that works well. Bike enthusiasts can gush for hours about all its wishbones and scaled composites and chain drive differentials, but for me it's just important that the bike is silver and looks like something out of a sci-fi movie - while at the same time maintaining that very certain British upper-crust quality also seen in the Jaguar.

If you want a professional rider's opinion on this bike, I suggest you check out www.sportrider.com/bikes/146\_0202\_tri/ where the inimitable Kent Kunitsugu claims: "No Japanese bike has that wonderful three-cylinder howl at full chat." Oh yeah.



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## OUT TO PLAY Timothy C. Best

# **Funny (Little) Games**

hen was the last time a game made you cry? Really tear up? No, tears of frustration don't count.

Just the other week I was talking to a friend of the family with a son who's my age, an engineer (yes, whichever way you read that is right, they're both engineers).

We're talking about what I do and he leans across with a just-betweenyou-and-me smile and says, "but aren't games just a little ... you know?"

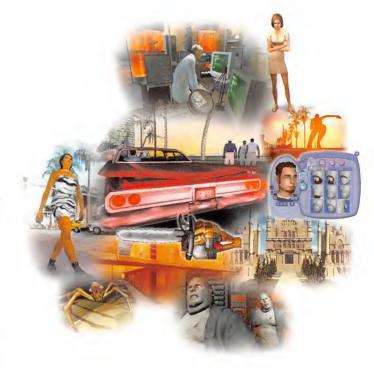
Yeah, I do know. I know exactly what the rest of that sentence would be: a little immature, a little superficial, a little childish

A week later I'm standing outside of an art-house cinema after watching student films from Victorian College of the Arts. I've been referred to as an expert. A woman, a couple of years older than me, says, "I have this niece and nephew and I want to kick their arses on a video game, what's something good to start with?"

I tell her she needs to see what they're playing and take that up. It's not like you can come to town with any horse and pony show and start throwing challenges around. television. Maybe there should just be t-shirts that say, "We are the future, hop on or be left behind," that get reprinted for every decade or so.

The other is trying to distil, into casual words, the essence of that moment in gaming where you're in the instant. Everything is on a heightened state of alert and your hands are working the game controls subconsciously - buttons are meaningless - there's just your intentions flowing onto the screen. You're ducking, you're weaving, you're impressing yourself with the crap you're pulling off. You want a video tape, you want to show your friends, you're making magic with skill, timing and inventive use of grenades. Right then gaming is an art. It might not be an art like opera, it's more like an art in the way Karate is an art. It's something fast and fluid and beautiful

The thing is: both the new-age rhetoric and experience of losing yourself in a game are insiders' views. If people get either, then you're giving the choir a rundown of Silent Night. So I'm running the TV argument through my head, talking about games as being just



liked that, so I guess it doesn't count.

If you look at the movies that turn into games they rarely fair any better.

Where are the gaming equivalents to American Beauty, Once Were Warriors, The Pianist, Shawshank Redemption, the Three Colours series, or even Big Fish, which got me in the end and even made me half-cry? (In case you're wondering about a "half cry" it worked like this: tears streamed from my left eye while my right eye just couldn't see what the fuss was about and Lord knows what was with that.)

In the case of movies like American Beauty and Big Fish the emotion impact comes from precise timing, delicate foreshadowing and all the pieces coming together in concert to paint a picture of great beauty.

When you sit down to movies like The Pianist, The Piano, Once Were Warriors or even The Passion of the Christ, you're not expecting to have much fun. You're expecting to be moved. On some level we know it's not about fun, it's about something bigger: sharing the human condition in all of its crappiness.

How many of us would sit down at a game for a similar experience? We've all stuck to our guns and battled through sections of games that were boring, frustrating and generally a pain in the arse, just to reap the rewards of the rest of the game, but that's quite a but different than sitting down at a game and knowing that it's just not going to be fun. That it's going to be hard going, but offer some sort of spiritual cleansing or understanding at the end (with the possible exception of some EverQuest players).

Now, I'm a big fan of games as art, but that even sounds terrible to me. I'm positive it's just because I haven't come across a game that has gripped me quite like that. Even when you're watching one of the sour-puss movies I've mentioned above, or listen to a Radiohead song for that matter, you always have the chance to walk out or turn it off, but something grips you and makes you stay.

So I'm looking at this woman, outside an art-house cinema, and I'm wondering if there is anything in games for her. I'm wondering if it's her fault for not getting it, or our industry's fault for not getting her.

To console myself I came home and played some Planescape: Torment and then watched Donnie Darko until I fell asleep.

# on some level we know it's not about fun, it's about something bigger: sharing the human condition in all of its crappiness

It's then she leans across with a just-between-you-and-me smile and says, "you know, I just never managed to get into them. I just don't get it."

What comes out of my mouth is that games are like TV or movies. The way a story is told is irrelevant; it's what it says and how it's said that's important. Meanwhile, my mind is screaming off in two tangents. One is the new-wave rhetoric that has been the birthright of every person shouting over a generation gap about things like rock n' roll, flower power, jazz music or

a medium, no more or no less immature, superficial or childish as films, novels, plays or TV. Even as I'm saying it, I'm starting to wonder, though.

Look at the games that get turned into movies: Tomb Raider, Double Dragon, Mario Brothers, Resident Evil and Mortal Kombat with Hitman, Metroid, Soul Calibur, Alien vs. Predator and possibly Doom in the works.

If we were talking about adult themes I'd have to lean towards Final Fantasy: Spirits Within, but no-one outside my immediate circle of friends

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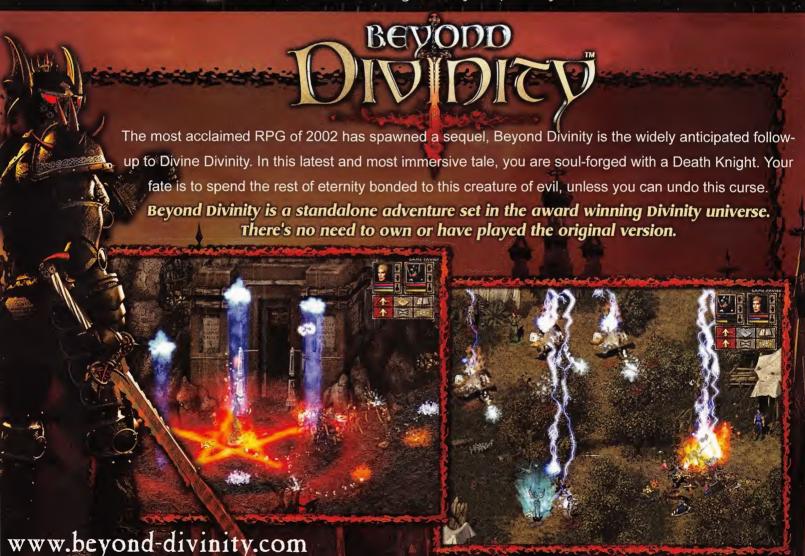
Cossacks European Wars also includes a large encyclopaedia of the various wars, units and the technologies of the time. Hundreds of missions, hundreds of hours of playing time, map editor, numerous rival nations to control or conquer.

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Sudden strike stands for a fantastic game of great depth, neverending possibilities and excellent gameplay. You will find yourself right in the middle of World War II where you have to conquer enemy emplacements and win house-to-house combat. Don't worry about reinforcements! Paratroopers and German "Jagdbombers" are waiting to back you up! Finally! All the titles in the one box!



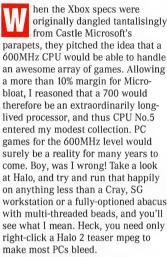






#### TECH TALK Jason Brown

# **Small console-ation**



The Xbox's final CPU choice of a 733Mhz processor has long since been surpassed, at least on paper, by the continual pursuit for progress. And yet, the Xbox's standardised architecture still allows it to perform at a more than competitive level. Still, you can't, much to the chagrin of many a gamer, take any old game CD, drop it in an Xbox (or vis a versa), and frag away.

#### **Breaking the laws**

Leaving aside the fact that any speculative Xbox developers would be cheating their way around Microsoft's royalty fees, one enterprising company has a patent that prohibits this ever happening. Digital Interactive Systems were sharp enough to lock in this patent, which proves that they invented the process of playing PC games on a television. Wow! Think that through and something significant should occur to you. They basically own the intellectual property as far as anyone, anytime, building a PC based gaming console goes. The Xbox is on safe ground, as its games aren't strictly PC, however any aspiring tech savvy group, hoping to MacGyver a motherboard, CPU and DVDROM together and declare it a console, faces a mighty legalistic challenge. Part of the appeal of such a console would surely be the limitless supply of existing and future titles. Without being able to utilise this resource,

you'd be relying on developers to produce proprietary-formatted games, which would be just as useful to us as Xbox games.

The patent hasn't been challenged yet, as the PC console capitalists have thus far been content to license the patented DISCover, ehhem, 'technology' from Digital Interactive. As a result, very soon, we'll have lashings of PC game consoles being released, each with different system specifications, abilities, and no compliancy or reference for the games' designs whatsoever! True, a system such as the soon to be released ApeXtreme console doesn't look too obsolete on paper. The Athlon XP2000 CPU and Nvidia Geforce 4 MX GPU, should run most pre-2005 games. Plus it multitasks as a medium-end multimedia rig and hard drive video recorder, all for around the \$300US mark. But speaking of marks, I think they've missed it. The silver tupperware encased PC, complete with configuration options out the wazoo, is not the epitome of userfriendly compatible console gaming. Trying to master the adjustment of the AA/AF settings so you can find the dialog box to enter the CD key into, is not something to be keenly anticipated.

It might not end up all that cheerless though. Admittedly it will give pseudo-console owners a nice cheap source of games, and there's a lot of fun to be had with lounge-room gaming, but there's also something to be said for games conforming to a standard. It is conceivable that if these consoles prove popular, developers could over-cater for them when producing new games. It'll probably realise the benefit I was looking for when I bought my 700MHz CPU, and we may see a slowing of system requirements that have long been whinge-worthy. But it will surely cause pain to the high speed Megahurtz chasers seeking to justify their latency timings, and additional suffering thanks to the variety of bits used in each console. So either way, someone's going to be royally cheesed. It seems that there might be more than just Moore's law affecting the PC's advancement.



Developers are currently pretty good at providing an array of settings in games to allow for less fortunate gamers, so it may be that by using relaxed default values in many games, they may be able to please 90% of the crowd. Maybe, but my guess would be that we'd start seeing press releases like "An expansion and compatibility pack to cater for reasonable-level PCs will be produced at some time in the future".

#### Any other consolations?

Well how else can it go? The Linux offering, the Indrema, fell victim to a random conspiracy theory in a dark alley, or perhaps just tripped over the above mentioned legality. However one adventurous group in Korea has brought a bold product to market that hopefully gives us a glimpse of future mentalities. It's not a PC, it's not a console, in fact it's a hand held quasi-PDA called a GamePark32, and is somewhat akin to a GBA on steroids. Its specifications are impressive for a handheld, but that's neither here nor there. What is special, is its software development strategy. The company produced a freely distributable SDK for anyone who cares to download it. The license allows any C++ coder in the world to recompile their games easily and quickly for the GP32. The games are then stored and accessed

via standard Smartmedia memory cards. What has resulted from this open mindedness is a mass of titles being developed by backyard coders, as well as several high calibre official titles. Another easy target for this platform was the emulator scene. Just about every emulator known to console-kind has been ported to the GamePark32, and while there are a few glitches, you're still spoilt for choice for such a low priced product. All without any royalty aspects to cripple the growth of the budding development community.

But this is not an advertisement for the GP32. I've not even put it through its paces yet. What I will say, is that if you did cobble those few PC parts together, and set some arbitrary specification standard in place for developers, the success of the PC console could be a real possibility. We PC dwellers love the expandability of our platform, but that may also end up being the expendability of our platform. Especially when we start to see the ApeXtreme 2600, and then the ApeXtreme 3000 roll out every other month.

Now if you'll excuse me, I need to go lodge my patent on bottomburping for small, medium and extra-large orifices...it should lead to a real windfall. Enter the Forbidden Demon City

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YU YU YAKUSHO



### THE GUERILLA GAMER

# **ADSL Follies**

es! At last I have broadband!
Believe me, it's been a long and
rocky road, and towards the end
the whole ordeal became positively
bizarre. Naturally, as soon as I
experience something bizarre, I want to
share it with you, the reader.

Let me set the scene - it's Australia in the early 21st century. The government does not give two hoots about broadband internet penetration. The semi-privatised national telecommunications carrier is either incompetent, uncaring, or possessed by the splintery red soul of Satan himself.

Enter the brave Guerrilla Gamer. Enter his funky cable connection. Enter a move to new accommodations when the old ones reveal themselves to be insulated by rather more asbestos than is currently considered safe. Enter a new suburb with funky underground services such as power and phone. Enter the tiny, ultra-modern exchanges that pipe fibre-optics to the street corner and turn out to be too damn small for DSLAM modules. Enter no more cable, and no ADSL.

A year of this I suffered, people, a year in the wilderness of a 31.2k modem connection. It was, may I say, hideous. Telstra continually spammed my snailmail box with promises of new exchanges to be built "soon", but it was left up to Optus - they of the mythical cable - to eventually let me know that "broadband was now available in my area". They illustrated this availability with a picture of a hawk, which confused me until I saw the little hamster in a Telstra waistcoat scurrying through the field below...

So verily I turned my back on both Telstra and Optus and signed up for 1500k ADSL with Provider X. So there I was, twitching slightly as the electric thought of a return to broadband internet coursed through my veins... I had only a scant few days to wait, two weeks at most, or so I thought.

The first I realised things were heading for the twilight zone was when I got an email from Provider X explaining that although Telstra had indeed built a new ADSL-capable exchange in my area, my line was on either a Pair Gain System or a Remote Integrated Multiplexer, thus making it incompatible with ADSL. "Uh huh," I said. Not to worry, said Provider X, because Telstra had "promised" to "try" to find an alternative route for my line but alas, no one anywhere in the whole of Western Civilisation had any idea how long that might take.



# the ambulance was still parked out the front and the Telstra rep was still conscious

Then began the Long Wait. I chewed my nails. I paced the halls. I took to walking up to the street corner and spitting on the manhole cover that concealed my stupid ultra-modern Pair Gain System and/or Remote Integrated Multiplexer. In short, I lurked.

Then, one night as I was in the middle of uploading a 10MB movie update to my Llama porn site, my phone went dead. Cold. Silent as the grave. And it stayed like that for two hours and then came back on again. Nobody called. Nobody said anything.

Two weeks later, I got another email from Provider X. They indicated that they had a "tentative" date for my ADSL upgrade - Friday the 13th.

Did I scream then? Did my sluggish, spongey, modem-affected brain flip up any warning signals? Did it occur to me that for some reason I should have maybe stayed at home on Friday the 13th, armed with a fireextinguisher, just, you know, in case?

Obviously, these are rhetorical questions. On the afternoon in question, the fire brigade met me halfway up the street and explained very nicely that there had been very little damage, beyond some carbonscoring around the edges of the fusebox, caused by the Telstra representative trying to open it by jamming a screwdriver into a live relay. The ambulance was still parked out the front of my house, and the Telstra representative was at that point still conscious, and able to give me a heavily bandaged thumbs-up just before they slammed the doors and sped him away to the burns unit.

Eagerly, I rushed inside and flipped on my PC. I'll spare you the continuing saga of my battle with my wireless router, and say for the sake of argument that it was working. The ADSL, however, wasn't.

I rang Telstra, who immediately disavowed all knowledge of "the mission" and "the operative injured in the mission" saying they had no job recorded for my address, phone number, street, town, state, country or planet. Just then there came a heavy knock, a dread knock even, at my door.

I slammed the receiver down on the blistering idiot on the other end, strode the six steps from my bedroom to my front door, and flung it open. There,

backlit by the setting sun, stood a great mountain of a man, clad in Telstra Bigpond vestments.

"Repent!" he cried, and grabbed me by the shoulder in a pincer grip. He spun me around, frog marched me up to the street corner and forced me to my knees before the manhole cover. He knelt beside me and flipped open a tech support manual.

"Let us pray!" he cried. "Om manu broadband on!" He mashed my forehead heavily into the ground, then leapt up and ran off into the gathering dusk. I reeled on the street corner for a moment and then dragged my bruised carcass back inside.

I had just slumped in front of the Simpsons when the phone rang. "Mate, it's Gary from up at the exchange. We've just flipped you over to the new system so that ADSL should be working fine for you now."

"Thanks Gary," I said, a wave of bliss washing over me. I paused for a moment's quiet reflection. Then I rushed into the computer room, flipped on the router and watched with glee as the ADSL light blinked, blinked, blinked faster and then held steady.

"Yippee!" I cried, and opened the router's config screen on my PC.

"Unable to connect," said the router.
"No!" I cried and leapt for the
phone, easily punching in the wellpracticed digits of Provider X.

"Please be advised the call centre is currently unstaffed due to an evacuation," said a recorded nerd.

Of course, now I have ADSL and I'm flinging Llama porn around the net in much the same way as one of those guys who spins plates, except with more Llamas. I only wish that the end of this anecdote were at all interesting: basically, I couldn't connect to the ADSL because I was using the wrong username. I shouldn't have been using my actual username, but instead my username with a 1 after it because that's what Provider X changes your username to while it's waiting for Telstra to let them know that the line upgrade is complete. Four weeks later, I think they're still waiting.

There are 10,000 stories of painful broadband installations in the naked city. This has been one of them.

The Guerrilla Gamer is a veteran PC games journalist who promises us he will now be able to meet his deadlines because he now has broadband. "It's not a panacea," he says, "but it has solved all of my problems."

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DREAMCATCHER



# DEVELOPER DIARY

## S.T.A.L.K.E.R Shadow of Chernobyl

Entry #5

e have spoken of the Exclusion Zone. We have described it as a place of uncontrolled horrors that emerged from the appalling tragedy of the Chernobyl nuclear explosion. The full story, however, is only just unfolding. Our Zone is a law unto itself. What little control we had in creating it has been surpassed by the rules we set in motion. Our advanced Al has made a region where nothing is predictable and everything is in constant flux. We may have populated the Zone but what happens next is anyone's guess. To look at how this kind of Al works in S.T.A.L.K.E.R. we must first look at the Zone itself...

Monsters, mutated and malevolent stalk the land. Whether indigenous or drawn from the underbelly of our world is not known but all of them hide in this hinterland of civilisation. The varied terrain gives shelter to an equally varied fauna whose mutations and abilities have adapted at a phenomenal rate to the irradiated landscape. Amid the wastelands and frozen tundra is an enemy of unified purpose. Survival is their game and whether it be a pack of rabid dogs alert to the approach of potential prey, or a darker, more self-aware intelligence with designs on the same secrets you hunt for, the danger is

paramount. Amongst the undergrowth or beneath the hillsides cracked with cramped tunnels, these monsters know their purpose. And they know their hunting grounds too. Every crack, every crook, every nook, every brook, the Zone shelters those who respect its laws and surprises those who fumble in the dark.

All of this is made possible by our goal of simulating realism in every move and every decision those horrors should make. Each of them is capable of reacting to a situation in much the same way as you or I would. They are capable of an individual choice through emotional or strategic parameters. They evaluate the situation in ways that elevate them beyond the level of the usual run of non-player characters (NPCs) into the realm of true competitors. What would the point be of anything else? It would be a simple matter to beat the player hands down but where is the challenge in that? The creation of a human-like intellect on the other hand, with all of its emotions: panic, fear, elation, and the ability to 'think' - that is a goal worth pursuing. In S.T.A.L.K.E.R. the enemy will not disappoint.

Take an example: an opponent with instincts beyond its species loses sight of its prey. Our AI gives it the ability to guess the location of the opponent rather than knowing it for certain. The creature, its senses honed by the environment, metaphorically places itself in the mind of the enemy and tries to work out where it would go in his place. The aim, and this bears repeating, is not to create faultless NPCs but rather to create plausible competitors. They should possess virtual senses that are as affected by the environment as their real world counterparts. So obstacles will affect line of sight, brittle undergrowth will affect the audible approach of predators (or prey) and NPCs will have the same desire to survive a hostile encounter as we do. They too will formulate strategies that take into account the landscape or the lighting. They too will approach from the safest side and they too will be subject to the dictates of fear.

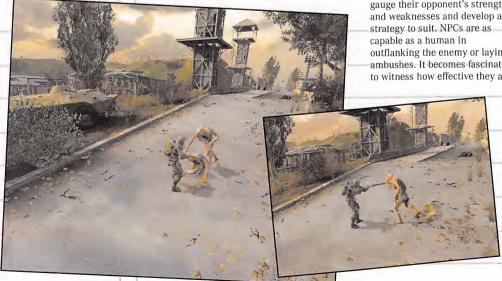
Computer controlled combatants will constantly evaluate the situation and retreat whenever necessary. This could happen when the NPC is injured or the odds are overwhelming. Conversely, they will be able to gauge their opponent's strengths and weaknesses and develop a strategy to suit. NPCs are as capable as a human in outflanking the enemy or laying ambushes. It becomes fascinating to witness how effective they are

at maintaining distances, judging the physical state of the opponent, assessing morale levels and then acting upon all the information gathered. Even a creature that appears weak or tactically inferior will be able to seize any opportunity that could arise - such as the stalker running out of ammunition or a weapons malfunction. In situations such as these you had better hope you have a good understanding of the terrain and an even better set of legs.

Remember too that vehicle physics are brought into the equation in the bid for cohesive realism. Just as the range of parameters for the creatures makes for varied and interesting gameplay, so too will the vehicles become something more than Just ways of getting around the land. With capacity, fuel requirements and a whole destructible framework, the vehicles feature as much as an opportunity as they do a potential hindrance.

Of course all these elements are balanced with the underlying desire to make S.T.A.L.K.E.R. fun and in future diary excerpts we'll tell you exactly how that will be achieved.

Alexei Sytyanov, Game Designer, GSC Game World







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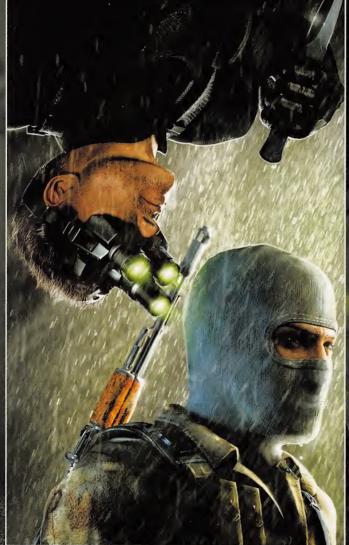




# SPLINTER CELL 3

Developer: Ubisoft Publisher: Ubisoft Distributor: Ubisoft Due: November





Sam Fisher returns with an all-new hairstyle, all-new toolkit, all-new technology and all-new lead platform. David Wildgoose is only happy when it rains...

t's Wednesday, May 12, the first day of E3. We arrive at LA's expansive convention centre and, once through the worryingly lax security check, we join the queue at the Starbucks trolley for what will be our only sustenance until after the show ends at 6pm. To encourage time to pass while we wait behind approximately forty other equally agitated show-goers, we crane our necks and squint our eyes to see if we can discern what gaming pleasures await us beyond the yetto-open-to-media main doors of the South Hall.

Inside we spy the EA stand and its giant (and only slightly phallic) video screen. We see a glimpse of Buena Vista and Vivendi. And oh, there's THQ (we think) further down the back, Unimpressed, our eyes wander back to the foreground and those main doors and stop. How did we miss it? Either side of the front entrance is a twice-life-size, luminous green and black poster of Sam Fisher. The text at the top says "Splinter Cell 3".

Cool, we think to ourselves, must check that out later on. Then... hang on, what happened to Splinter Cell 2?

Several hours later we take our seats inside a dark, very hot and slightly smelly theatre to catch the unveiling of Splinter Cell 3 (codenamed Chaos Theory, as we later discover). Within seconds of the in-game footage starting, our slack jaws betray why this game needs a 3 suffixed to its title - it looks simply incredible, so much so one can only assume Ubisoft felt it wasn't just one generation ahead of Splinter Cell (and spin-off Pandora Tomorrow, built from the same technology as the first game) but two.

We see Sam Fisher in close-up. He looks terrifyingly real. He's standing in a ravine through which trickles a stream. He wades through the dynamic water and up an incline, sidling into the shadows below an outcropping. Above there's a guard patrolling near an area lit by a single lantern. Fisher shoots out

the lantern, alerting the guard who proceeds to strike up a flare and drop it down the ravine to flush out the intruder. Startled, Fisher hides in a new shadow created by a combination of the flare and the absence of the lantern's glow. Seeing nothing, but evidently hearing something, the guard jumps into the ravine for a closer inspection. Fisher seizes the moment to strike, eliminating resistance with a silent but brutal snap of the neck.

So far, so very Splinter Cell, yes? Well, okay, to a certain extent that statement is true. Splinter Cell 3, at least as far as its single-player missions go, appears to depart little from the basic formula - scout the area, assess the threats, then strike as swiftly and silently as possible. Of course, it does look amazing - in terms of sheer graphical gloss, polish, sheen or what have you, this was the single most impressive game at the show. Yes, better looking than Doom 3, Half-Life 2 and Stalker. So much so that at this stage Ubisoft has only announced a PC version; they're still trying to work out just how they can do this game justice on a console.

#### **Ambitious**

In fact, when announcing the game, Yves Guillemot, the head of Ubisoft, boldly claimed that Splinter Cell 3 would be "the best looking game on any platform, period." We asked Mathieu Ferland, the project's producer at the French publisher's Montreal studio, just how his team plans to deliver on that promise.

"Montreal has always been very strong in graphics, and we're trying to be ahead of our time, leading the industry in that area. For Splinter Cell 3, our ambition is to consider our technology as a whole, even though graphics have always been an important value for the Splinter Cell franchise. Al, animation, online network, sound engine, development tools and of course 3D rendering are all important

elements we're investing a lot into in order to produce the game we've got in mind.

"Regarding graphics, we've been implementing normal mapping, per pixel specular lighting for reflections and a bit of procedural texturing. Development of soft shadows also contributes a lot to nice visuals. But I would say the main difference is how well these elements are used by our experienced team. Graphics are still

very important as it is the first contact with the gamer's most important physical sense. We all know how important a first impression is and this is an extra motivation for us to provide the best, and only the best."

Consider us impressed, then. But not just by the sheer opulence of Montreal's procedural specular whatsits. We're impressed by the tricks Sam Fisher has tucked away in that painstakingly normal mapped sleeve, too. During the rest of the demonstration we see a guard investigate and relight a candle Fisher has snuffed out moments earlier or curse at a now-broken television set our hero has just put a silenced bullet through. We see Fisher creep up on an enemy only visible by his shadow cast on the other side of a rice paper wall then punch through the flimsy structure, grab said victim in a choke hold and snap his neck. We see Fisher on a

lookout post at the top of a lighthouse, swing himself over the railing and shimmy around to the other side, legs dangling above the rocky, watery death below, then reach up and grab the leg of a guard and hurl him over the edge.

However, Ferland promises that Splinter Cell 3 will offer up more than just yet more cool moves and actions for the player to perform. We'd heard some fancy talk concerning an open level design.









## FISHING FOR DETAILS

Clint Hocking is the Creative Director and Scriptwriter for the Splinter Cell games. We quizzed him about Sam Fisher, the man, and the world in which he inhabits.

How has Sam Fisher grown as a character throughout the series and how will we see him grow yet further in the third game? Great characters are great because of their weaknesses, not because of their strengths. Sam Fisher is no exception. He's human, he's fallible, he's aware of his own mortality, and he doesn't want to die. Sam isn't out there with a missile launcher looking to kick some butt. Sam is on the front line of a very precarious conflict where that kind of gung-ho attitude will just get him killed.

Sam is also a pretty complex guy, and one thing we're doing with his character for Splinter Cell 3 is amplifying some of those

complexities. We're working with Sam's dialogue and examining ways we can deepen his character by tracking what the player is doing. By writing multiple versions of his dialogue and choosing which version is played at which event based on what the player has done before, we can illustrate all the different aspects of Sam's personality. If the player is very stealthy, or very aggressive, or very exploratory, we can track this information and use it to present variants of the dialogue... it's all still Sam... it's just Sam adapted to suit his (and the player's) behaviour.

Sam will have a dynamic personality based on his previous actions, the same way anyone's personality shifts based on the number of cups of coffee they've had before getting to work, or the number of bills they had to pay that day. By revealing the side of Sam that most closely matches the player's actions, we expect the player will identify with Fisher more strongly than ever.

The Tom Clancy world necessarily touches upon some sensitive, contemporary political situations. What sort of responsibility do you feel when creating the scenarios for each game? Can something be considered "too political" to be included in the game?

We put a great deal of thought into our scenarios and situations. On the one hand, we have a responsibility to create the most believable world that we can, but we also have to recognise that there are many real-world issues that people feel very strongly about. We certainly don't censor ourselves, but we also need to be sure we aren't being callous or ignorant, or - worse - actually contributing to real world political problems by making a game that appears to have a political agenda. We're not politicians. We're entertainers. In the end, Splinter Cell is not about politics.

Splinter Cell is a game, and games are about interaction. In today's world, people frequently feel disempowered... they feel like the world political situation is way beyond their control. In Splinter Cell, people get to interact with a mock-up of the real world and that helps them see that even these very big, very frightening, very impersonal events really often come down to very small actions. I think the game helps people feel like they have a little more control over their lives and the world around them.





multiple paths and optional objectives, but such things appeared somewhat thin on the ground in the above footage. While this is perhaps the inevitable result of the highly orchestrated manner in which the game was shown, we felt it necessary to ask Ferland which side of the linear/non-linear divide their game is this time going to fall.

"We've decided to develop a nonlinear game for many reasons," he began, in a clear statement of intent. "First, it's a smart way to solve issues we had with previous games in terms of navigation. For example, in SC1, if you're not triggering the conversation into the morgue and make it directly to retrieve the videos, it didn't happen and the game was not supporting that.

"Second, it removes game over situations where the player missed a non-critical objective. A non-linear structure is forgiving the player for such failures as the game boundaries are much wider.

"Finally, we thought that being able to make decisions about which objective to

accomplish first, or which way to go first, are just great things for the gamer. It brings more freedom, more replay value... and more fun!"

Admirable sentiments, undoubtedly, though we may choose to reserve our judgement for later. At the very least, the single-player missions are shaping up to be a much better looking and much cooler take on those from the two earlier games.

### Co-on Cool

Following the lead of Pandora Tomorrow, it's now vital that Montreal serves up an equally compelling multiplayer experience to complement the core solo game. Yet instead of the inventive Spies vs Mercs mode, this time they've surprisingly opted for a different approach - straight co-operative play - as Ferland explains.

"Pandora Tomorrow was the very first game - and still the only one - to allow stealth as a core concept for adversarial multiplayer. For Splinter Cell 3 we're proposing a never-seen-before co-op mode where you must trust your partner more than ever to succeed."

Witness a covert assault on an office building. One operative gives his colleague a leg up to climb a wall. The latter then shimmies up a pipe while the former scans for enemy approach via a sticky cam. Once on the roof, one guy drops a rope to the ground and his friend begins to scale the side of the building. The climber

uses his headset to instruct the rope to be swung left or right to avoid the lit windows on each floor. It's magnificently tense stuff.

"Still based on stealth, you must beat the AI using communication, trust, and of course the best of your skills. Think of all you can do in single-player, expand the tactics and add more

thrills while playing with a partner, add co-operation, add synchronisation and more... And then you might start to get a feeling of what the new co-op mode is like."

Not to mention that nagging feeling of why someone hasn't done this before. From now on, co-op play isn't about twice the firepower or utilising each character's specialised skills, it's about HELPING EACH OTHER to achieve otherwise impossible tasks. It's about extending the range of possible actions. It's very, very cool.

Which seems as good a way of summing up Splinter Cell 3 as we can think of. Very cool. A bit like that coffee now waiting for us at the head of that bloody queue...



# INVASION

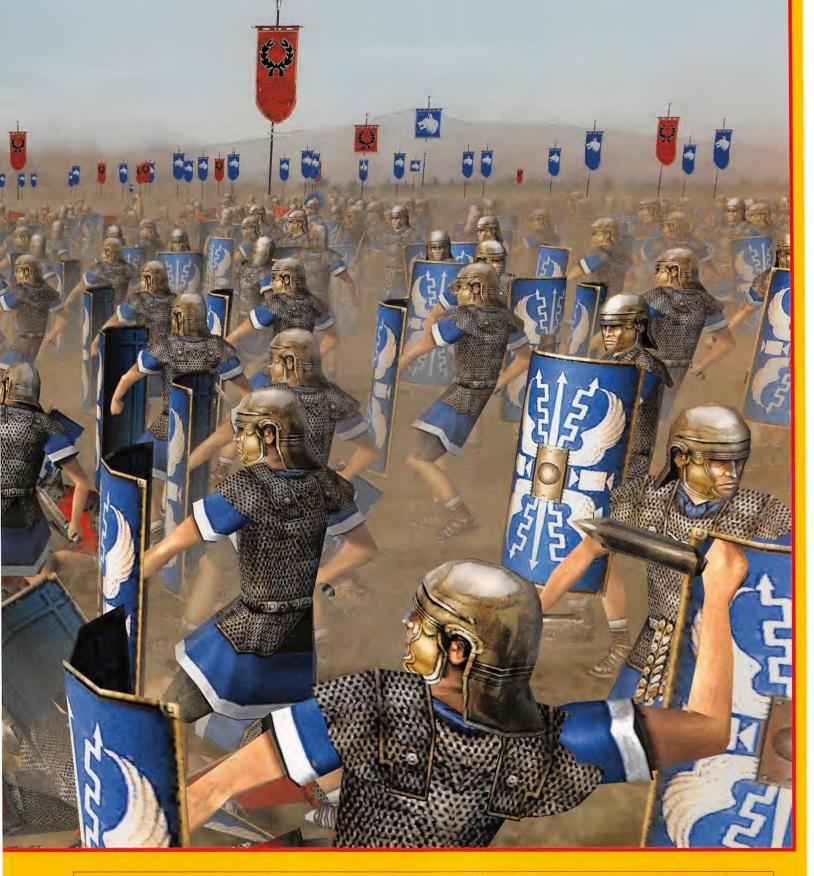
We came. We saw. We conquered.

And that was just LA's hottest nightspots.

Once we'd finished our seabreezes, we realised there were also some games to check out.

David and Bennett bring you all the news from the E3 showfloor...





### Rome: Total War

Still the biggest and the best. Despite an ever-growing army of challengers seeking to steal its crown, Rome remains firm as the most promising strategy game on the battlefield. No other title can squeeze the same number of units onto the screen nor match Creative Assembly's engine for the sheer scale of each battle. And no other title can boast quite the same degree of depth thanks to the deep strategic options of the war map and the tactical flexibility of the encounters. Rome truly is a Total War. In a word: EPIC







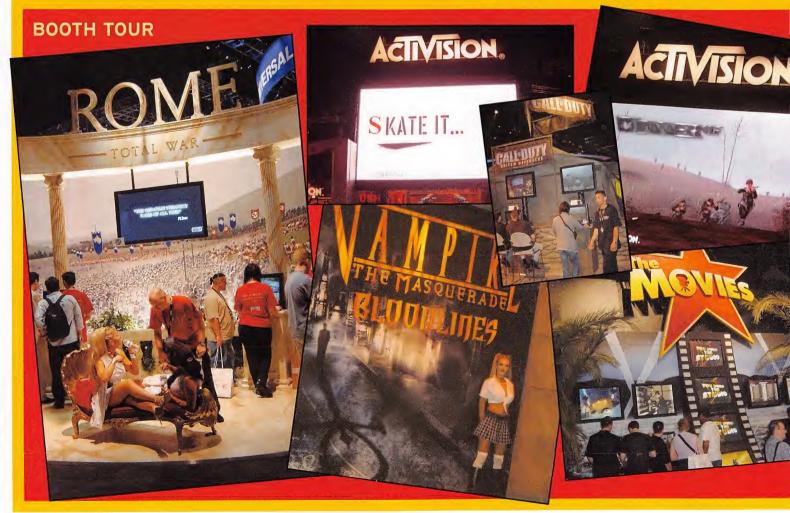
### Spiderman 2

Although not shown running on PC, much to our dismay, the Xbox demo gave a good impression of what we can look forward to from Spidey's next outing. Adhering to a bigger is better philosophy, developer Treyarch is promising a much larger New York to explore and many more tasks to perform. Missions are now triggered when you reach certain areas of the city or speak with certain people - some will be random challenges, some will propel the story forward. Review next issue, fingers crossed.

In a word: ACROBATIC









### The Movies

We saw this late last year at the Activate event in Sydney and came away intrigued by the concept but none the wiser about how it would play. At E3, Lionhead's movie mogul sim now looks like a bona fide game. The interface looks slick and intuitive, the visual style boasts bags of muchneeded personality, and the movie editing tools appear powerful and flexible. Amusingly, the demo we saw showed budding actor Peter Molyneux throwing a tantrum at the paucity of his trailer. We then requested he see a shrink about his sex addiction. In a word: BLOCKBUSTER



### Vampire: Bloodlines

A deep role-playing game.
With real-time, first-person
combat. Using Half-Life
2's immaculate Source
engine. It's like Troika
designed a game with
only our editor in
mind. Think Deus Ex
with more character
stats, a sexier setting
and delicious visuals.

From what we saw, White Wolf fans concerned about how the Source tech might dilute the core RPG values have nothing to worry about. From deep Arcanum-esque character creation to extensive dialogue trees to combat where success is mainly determined by your stats, this is very much a role-playing game first, hybrid action game second.

In a word: ANGELIC





### **ACTIVISION**

The initial disappointment regarding the absence of the PC version of Doom 3 at Activision's stand quickly subsided once we caught sight of the booth babe in pigtails and short, tartan skirt near the Vampire display... I mean, once we'd briefly checked out the Rome: Total War girls reclining on a... I mean, once we'd sampled the playable Xbox version in the dark and undoubtedly smelliest - demo room housing id's horror shooter. Running against the grain, Doom 3 isn't about the realistic squadbased AI tactics every other FPS at the show was boasting, it's about grabbing you by the balls and dragging you kicking and screaming through the most visceral haunted house you could imagine. It looks like a lot of fun.

But back to that Vampire chick... it was kinda weird seeing her in the flesh after almost using her rendered inspiration as cover art a few issues back. Ever freakier were the terrifyingly tall guys dressed as American GIs patrolling the United Offensive bunker, barking orders to get out of their way and giving you death stares if you dared to snap their photo.

Overall Activision had an impressively solid line-up with every major genre covered. Only a lack of something genuinely new prevented it from scooping our publisher award.

### Call of Duty: United Offensive

We were anticipating more of the same from the expansion pack to our Game of the Year for 2003 (and #1 in our Top 100 last issue) and, er... we were right. Albeit with the emphasis firmly on the "more" instead of the "same". Gray Matter appears to have surpassed all expectations, upping the ante (and the action) to produce a worthy follow-up. If you thought the Stalingrad missions were intense, then we should warn you that every map we saw of this was just as - if not more - pumped full of carnage and chaos.

In a word: SHELLSHOCKED







### **EIDOS**

Upon arriving at the Eidos stand we made a bee-line for the Thief: Deadly Shadows demo pods - circumnavigating the extraordinary queue for some bgrade celebrity signing session - and rekindled our love affair with Garrett. But more on that later in the issue (see our review on page 67). Elsewhere, there was little of interest for hardcore PC gamers on the show floor, Eidos preferring to demonstrate the console versions of upcoming shooters Shellshock and Snowblind, Smaller than in previous years, Eidos' presence seemed indicative of a company struggling to find itself post-Angel of Darkness.







### Imperial Glory

A genuine surprise, this hardcore strategy title from Pyro Studios offers immense promise. Drawing on their Commandos and Praetorians experience, Pyro wants to conquer the same territory as the Total War series, however they promise more diplomatic options on the strategy map and more diversity (if fewer units) on the battlefield. We saw a squad bunker down in a ruined temple, utilising available cover, before being routed as the enemy trebuchets destroyed the building completely.

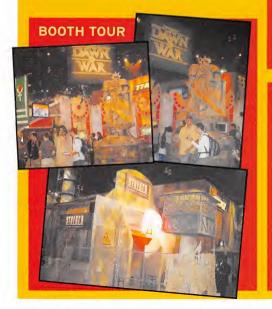
### **Snowblind**

Another previously unheard of title that impressed us. From Crystal Dynamics, Snowblind is a cyberpunk fuelled shooter with an emphasis on frantic action and crazy weaponry. The premise seems heavily influenced by Deus Ex, as you play a nano-augmented special ops agent, but the gameplay is all about shooting first and forgetting you were going to ask questions later. We particularly liked the portable riot shield you can drop onto the battlefield at any moment to use as cover until its energy expires. In a word: KINETIC



### THQ

THQ know how to set up a seriously cool booth. While it was a little lacking in the screen department, they had the coolest set pieces of the lot. The Stalker theatre was quite simply massive, and captured the look of the game perfectly. Possibly the funniest stand of the show was The Punisher; this two story building facade had a dummy of The Punisher standing on the roof, dangling a criminal over the edge upside down, with said criminal writhing and wriggling. Warhammer fans would have been able to recognise the statue in the midst of the Dawn of War demo area - sadly we have lives (or at least pretend to), so we had no idea who the hell this dwarfish dude was.



### Dawn of War

Even if this game sucked golf balls through a hose pipe it'd still sell millions of copies to the legions of loyal Warhammer fans out there. Thankfully it's looking to be a solid game in its own right though, with some nice sci-fi flavoured up close and personal battles going on. It's not looking to take on the Rome: Total Wars of the world, with battles consisting of around a hundred units or so.

In a word: LICENSE



### **BOOTH TOUR**



### Stalker: Shadow of Chernobyl

Every time we see this game it looks a little better than the last, which is surprising as it already looked so good in the first place. This time around we were lucky enough to be able to take the controls, and even amidst the hustle and bustle of the THQ stand found ourselves being drawn into the detailed, realistic world before us. The AI is coming along nicely - during the demo each entity in the zone followed its own unique impulses. The animals could be seen hunting in packs, foraging for food, running from danger or taking shelter from the elements, all without having to be hard scripted.

In a word: BRAVE





### **Dungeon Siege 2**

We entered our Dungeon Siege 2 session as hardened cynics but left as mere mild skeptics. Although not entirely persuasive, our 20 minutes in the company of the decidedly evolutionary action-RPG certainly proved that Microsoft appreciated many of the criticisms of the first game and is keen to rectify them for the sequel. An overhauled quest structure should offer some room for exploration while the expanded conversation system should tell a more compelling tale. But it's the new pets - and their capacity for skill upgrades and customization - that really got us excited. It still looks really pretty too. In a word: PET-TACULAR





### Zoo Tycoon 2

It's easy to dismiss the Zoo Tycoon franchise simply because of its fun for the whole family, pseudo-educational appeal, but that would be a savage injustice to a genuinely smart game and perhaps the best management sim since Rollercoaster Tycoon. The sequel updates the whole experience into 3D - hardly replete with cutting edge pixel shaders and real-time lighting, but nonetheless a decent improvement over the original. It's also allowed for two clever firstperson modes where you can groom your animals or take photos of them. If you want to get your girlfriend into gaming, show her this. In a word: BEASTLY





### **MICROSOFT**

No Age of Empires 3 (or whatever Shelley and co are up to), no Mechwarrior for PC, nor even a Flight or Train Sim to catch the eye meant a fairly subdued showing from the Redmond giant. However we did see two reasonably anticipated sequels to two reasonably well-received games as well as a behind-closed-doors viewing of the first MMO from Sigil Games, the studio founded by Everquest creator Brad McQuaid. But the Microsoft booth was essentially an Xbox booth, with Halo 2 wowing everyone (us included - it simply must come to PC, please!) and just about every first and third-party Xbox game in playable form throughout the massive stand. The meagre handful of PC titles was largely ignored up the back, despite their obvious quality. A shame.

### **BOOTH TOUR**



### Vanguard: Saga of Heroes

We're not sure what to make of this since it's obviously still very early in development - a situation betrayed by the projected release date of late 2005. It's an MMO in typical fantasy tradition - think elves, dwarves, dragons etc - and pledges a slightly different take on the Everquest formula. It's bloody big, for a start, allegedly significantly bigger than any rival MMO. Born from this massive size is the concept of "meaningful travel", to use Sigil's own phrase, in which the journey holds as much adventure and enjoyment as the destination. Characters may also advance simultaneously in two classes (one adventuring, one crafting).

In a word: SAGACIOUS







### ATARI

Alas we weren't privileged enough to gain entry into the inner sanctum of Atari's booth, as the Aussie PR guy didn't book us in for an appointment. Fair enough. It's not like we wanted to go anyway - we had better things to do with our time, like doing our hair and getting a manicure. Damn. But judging by the disappointed faces of those leaving the booth, we didn't really miss out on much anyway.

### Rollercoaster Tycoon 3

There's one thing you need to know about this game: Coaster Cam. This first person camera view lets you see your latest creation for the perspective of a punter, and it's bloody cool. Well, it is the first few times - we're just not certain whether or not you're going to keep on using it once the novelty wears off. Other than that, the major improvement over RT2 appears to be the massively revamped graphics engine. In a word: RALPH!



### **Axis and Allies**

We're a little confused about this one. While the description of the game sounds like its more of a strategic title, where you need to lead one of the big 5 through World War II on a global scale, the screenshots tell a different tale. These show a game that is all about the battlefield, down at the unit level. Oh well, it's bound to be a killer title due to the fact that the same guys behind Kohan are developing this one. In a word: KOHANISh



### **MAJESCO**

Although far from a top-tier publisher, Majesco had a few cool titles that we felt deserved a mention. Tucked away behind the glitz and glamour of the Activision and Ubisoft booths, only the most intrepid reporters would have even noticed their stand at all if it wasn't for the rather attractive attraction of Ms Ute Werner, aka Ms BloodRayne herself. If we were an online publication we'd have voted her Best Boothbabe of the Show. But we're not. So we didn't. Aside from the endearingly tacky charms of BloodRayne 2 and Advent Rising, we also spent too long playing Guilty Gear X2 Reloaded on Xbox, but don't tell anyone ok?



### **Advent Risina**

An old-school shooter with some newschool stylings, Advent Rising pays tribute to its ridiculous name by serving up an equally ridiculous blast-a-thon. One part Painkiller, two parts SHOGO, and three parts Enter the Matrix, Majesco's overthe-top action shooter is awash with dumb clichés, pyrotechnics and lots of really rather cool bits. There are aliens and big robots, bounty hunters and boss monsters, flyable vehicles and bullet time, telekinesis powers and undead minions; it's all very silly but very playable at the same time. Excuse the obvious low-budget limitations and we think this will be a blast. In a word: FURIOUS





### BloodRayne 2

It was tough to dislike the original BloodRayne - it had a hot vampire chick killing Nazis, after all. What more could you honestly ask for? Developer Terminal Reality seems to think the answer to that question is nothing, and so it has removed the Nazis. Hmm. What we're left with is a hot vampire chick killing, er... some dudes. Which is disappointing really, but at least there's still the hot vampire chick herself. Oh and the killing. It's in the beefing up of this latter element that the sequel makes the most strides, with death-by-useful-objects-in-the-environment being far more prevalent than before. We remain cautiously optimistic.

In a word: NAZI-LESS









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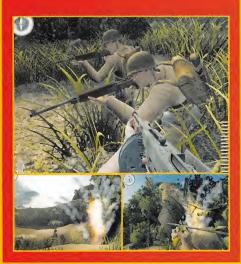
# ELECTRONIC ARTS

Our lasting memory of the EA booth will be of the panoramic screen that stretched from one side of the stand to the other. For three days, this BFO display looped rolling demos of perhaps the biggest names and franchises in gaming - The Sims, Medal of Honor, Madden, Need for Speed etc - while an awestruck crowd gazed up from below. EA always dominates proceedings at the show, partly because the publisher has the cash to occupy prime position near the entrance to South Hall (the largest of the halls at the LA convention centre) but mostly because it has the cash to create the biggest, brightest and loudest booth. This year was no exception. However refuge was found off the nightmarish floor as we enjoyed relatively peaceful behindclosed-doors demos of Battlefield 2 and Black & White 2, two of the most impressive titles of the entire show.

### Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault

Aside from the change of setting to the Pacific theatre of war and, let's be honest, a markedly superior renderer, there's little to distinguish this from Cali of Duty at first glance. A more extended play session is necessary to reveal whether in fact EA has actually surpassed the intense cinematic experience of our Game of the Year, but for now things look pretty close. We jumped on board a thriiiing rollercoaster ride of a mission situated during the battle for Guadalcanal, clearing out a jungle village before emerging onto an airstrip to assist our comrades in the chaotic dogfight in the skies above. The only problem was the lack of an invert mouse option in this made for E3 demo which made us look crapper at games than we actually are. Tsk.

In a word: CONSCRIPTED



### Armies of Exigo

A Warcraft 3 clone in virtually every aspect, this Hungarian developed RTS offers up a fantasy setting and three playable races with some very familiar gameplay. The twist is the way each map is divided into above and below ground regions, with the player having to wage war on both fronts. Whether this will be sufficient to distinguish what is otherwise a fairly straightforward take on the genre remains to be seen. in a word: MULTI-LAYERED



### The Sims 2

Are you sitting down? Good. This may come as something of a shock: The Sims 2 looks bloody good. It's not just the real-time 3D graphics that allow you to move the camera wherever you wish and see your exceptionally detailed Sims in extreme close-up. It's not just the video capture function that allows you to record an entire game then export the footage to any video editing software and cut together your own personal home movies (complete with speech and soundtrack). It's the shift in emphasis from the Sims needs (hygiene, hunger etc) to their wants and fears that makes this formidable sequel so appealing. We are genuinely looking forward to it now.









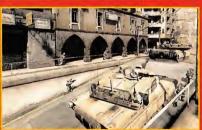
### Black & White 2

It was refreshing to hear Peter Moiyneux describe the original Black & White as "woolly" and a game that "lost the plot about halfway through". He's adamant that Lionhead has learnt a lot from the first game and has applied such lessons to good effect in the sequel. On the evidence of our chat and demo with Moiyneux and lead designer Jonty Barnes we'd now be inclined to agree.

If the first game allowed you to morph the world and your creature, then the second game is going to morph the gameplay as well. Play more aggressively and the experience becomes more of an RTS; adopt a more defensive or pacifist approach and it plays out like more of a god-sim or city building game. We'll have a more thorough look at this next issue.

### Battlefield 2

Once Bennett managed to stop hyperventilating over the demo movie of BF2 in action, we could sit back and appreciate the improvements over the original game. Teamplay has been given a massive shot in the arm due to the new squad features, and the ability to shoot through certain types of cover makes for more tense batties. While the graphics engine is much more detailed, it also allows the players to see further, which should prove to be a huge boon for pilots. We walked away from this game most impressed, and now Bennett has a new fantasy to replace TF2. in a word: WAR











### Catwoman

This was one of those rare titles that we knew little about when we hit E3. but after seeing it we left the show with high expectations. Considering the version running was on PS2, the amazing graphics on offer are nothing short of amazing. The control scheme is very innovative, borrowing from Fight Night's mechanics to power graceful Catwoman's Capoeira fighting moves. She also shares the same acrobatic prowess of our favourite Persian Prince, but leaves a slightly gay sparkiv trail whenever she does a particularly speccy maneuver. In a word: MEOW!





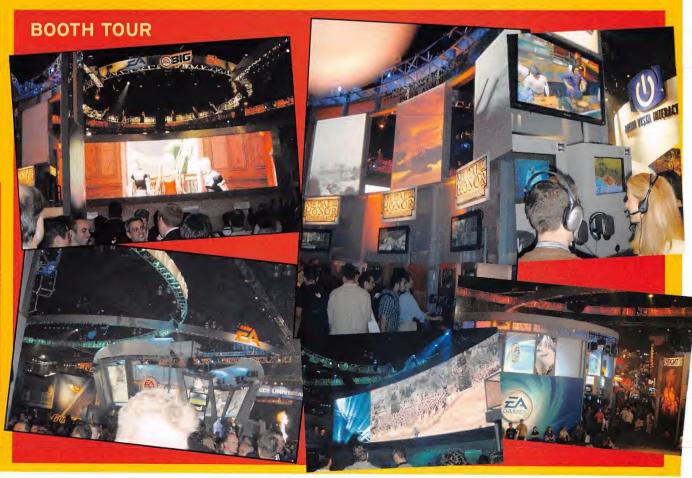
### **Battle for Middle Earth**

The core Command & Conquer guys travel to Middle Earth for some strategy on a real-time tip. The result is a curious beast indeed, a strange hybrid of generic RTS and Total War style macro-strategy. Ignore the stupendously rendered trailers with hundreds and thousands of units on screen you've probably seen - sure, it's mostly done via the game engine, but it's not actually in-game footage. On the overhead map you direct what appear to be massive armies. Once two armies clash, it's time for some RTS action as you build a base, gather resources and churn out mere handfuls of units. It's an odd combination and the contrast between the two levels of play appears jarring. In a word: TRADITIONAL









### **UBISOFT**

Ubisoft's booth proved that this company is becoming one of the largest third party developers around. While it didn't have the world's biggest screen, nor an abundance of hot chicks clothed in a few square centimetres of Lycra, it did have some very nicely designed set pieces. Most noteworthy was the full sized Hummer used for the Ghost Recon 2 demo; the guy controlling the demo actually sat in its .50 cal cupola. Splinter Cell 3 was tucked away in a special theatre, and attendees were given remote voting devices that allowed them to choose which parts of the game they'd like to see in action. FarCry Instincts had the obligatory fake jungle booth; it's just a pity

that the game didn't look too hot. But that's what you get when you try to port a cutting edge PC game to the consoles. The overall quality of the Ubisoft games was quite high, with a few standout titles - all of which are hitting the PC. We were expecting Splinter Cell 3 to push a few eye candy buttons, but we didn't expect it to look as good as it did. Brothers in Arms looks promising, but the fact that the Xbox debugger and the projector both crashed during its display didn't do it any favours. Serves them right for not showing the PC version, fools! A pleasant surprise was Silent Hunter III, which stood out as one of the best looking games of the show.

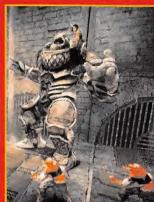
### PRINCE OF PERSIA II

We like the original Prince of Persia, with the exception of one thing. The Prince came across as a bit of a Nancy-boy, rather than the testosterone-laden adventure hero the role required of him. In fact, the entire game seemed a little too 'nice'. Never fear, as the sequel is going to change all that. While it still uses the same snazzy graphics engine, and intuitive acrobatic control scheme, this time around the Prince has taken his badass pills, and as a result it's a darker, moodier game. It also has much more gruesome fights, with bad guys being sliced into halves and quarters, complete with spraying blood. Now that's more like it!









### Silent Hunter III

It's time to get into something long and hard and full of seamen once again with Silent Hunter III. Considering it had such a small presence, being one lonely little display screen and a guy demoing it who said "Yaarr, me maties" far too often, the spectacular graphics were totally unexpected. Best. Water. EVER. Gameplay appears to be quite similar to the earlier games, although the damage management has been given an overhaul. In a word: PRETTY







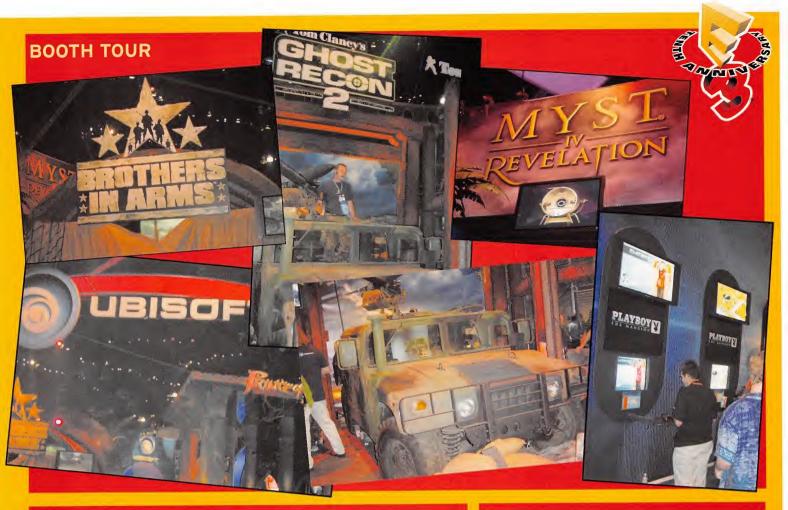
# Brothers in Arms

Yes, it's yet another WWII game, but this time around it has much more of a focus on squad based tactics than simply blowing away Nazis as an army of one. Our demo consisted of being parachuted inland during the D-Day invasions, and then storming a farmhouse containing several German soldiers. The devs are really pushing the Al as one of the game's key features, and for the most part it looks as if they've got it right. **Another impressive** feature was the ability to see for several kilometres, and all of the landscape has been modelled accurately to how it really appeared during WWII. In a word: TACTICS















### Myst IV

Ditching the 3D world that Uru bought to the series, Myst IV goes back to its roots with prerendered scenery. But due to some technical trickery these 2D backgrounds now seem much less static, with various animations helping to make scenes come to life. A new built in journal should make notetaking a much simpler task, and the three different help levels will ensure you'll be nudged in the correct direction to your liking.

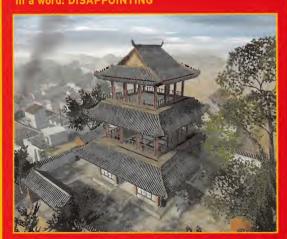


### Settlers V

Blue Byte's perennially "big in Germany" strategy series is making a concerted effort to break into the American market this time around. After considerable focus testing, the cutesy graphical look is gone, replaced by a more realistic look to give the atmosphere a shot of seriousness. Fans will be dismayed, though the developer hopes the move will attract many more newcomers to the game. Elsewhere the core gameplay appears intact, which should please those fans who can see beyond the new visual style. In a word: COMFORTABLE

### **Ghost Recon 2**

Why on Earth the Xbox version of this game was displayed is beyond us, because we're sure the PC version would have been much more impressive. During our demo two things stood out about it questionable AI and shocking framerates. No doubt the PC version will have better framerates, but the simplistic AI is a bit of a worry. Considering how much we loved the original, we couldn't help but be a little underwhelmed by the sequel. In a word: DISAPPOINTING









### SEGA

This year Sega chose to exhibit away from the hubbub of the main halls, instead occupying one of the more out-of-the-way and blessedly less noisy side rooms. Distancing itself from usual rivals Sony and Nintendo was probably a wise decision considering both the significant number of PC titles on display and the overall lack of genuine excitement across the publisher's range. Warhammer Online

wasn't playable, while the new Worms title showed a series still struggling with the switch to 3D. Elsewhere, securing the rights to Monolith's Matrix MMO was their big announcement you may have heard hyped prior to the show - to which "Is that it?" was the universal reaction. Sega's best game was undoubtedly Outrun 2 on Xbox. There's unlikely to be a PC version.

### The Matrix Online

Right, we know about the set up - a post-Reloaded period of uneasy peace between Zion and the machines where you play a blue-pill swallowing human. And we know about the wardrobe - wow, your cool leather clothes get even cooler and more leathery the more you play. And we know about the fighting - bullet-time kung-fu combos with the occasional special move. And we know about the skill system - character abilities are represented as software apps and upgrades. But we've still got no clear idea of how all this ties together into a playable and enjoyable game. Monolith is a developer with pedigree though, so we remain hopeful. In a word: SHINY







### **CODEMASTERS**

Oh dear. Located right at the back of the South Hall, we walked past the Codies booth several times before noticing it was there. The words 'uninspiring', 'lacklustre' and plain old 'boring' spring to mind. Perhaps things aren't going too well for Brit publisher; either that or they simply don't give a toss about E3 anymore. Which is surprising, as they actually had a few decent games on show - pity nobody would have noticed them. Oh well, at least it was a better booth than Atari's woeful attempt. But points off for the Operation Flashpoint 2 no-show.

### **Dragon Empires**

Looking to differentiate itself from other MMORPGs, Dragon Empires has a couple of nifty features. For starters, you can walk from one side of the land to the other without seeing a single loading screen. Secondly, each faction is allied to a certain dragon, and you'll see these winged killing machines hanging out over their respective territories. Players also have the ability to win control of cities, and to then tax the crap out of the inhabitants. Finally, DE has an innovative PvP mode unfortunately we were too hung over to remember what it was. That's what websites are for.







### **BOOTH TOUR**





### **Wartime Command**

In a word: DRACONIC

Strategy fans should start polishing their monocles soon, as Wartime Command is looking like it's on the final stretch. Using a tweaked IL2 Sturmovik engine, the ability to zoom way out and then back in to the troop level is a very cool touch. Performance is a little questionable though, but this could be due to the fact that Codemasters probably spent jack shit on their demo machines (if their booth is anything to go by).

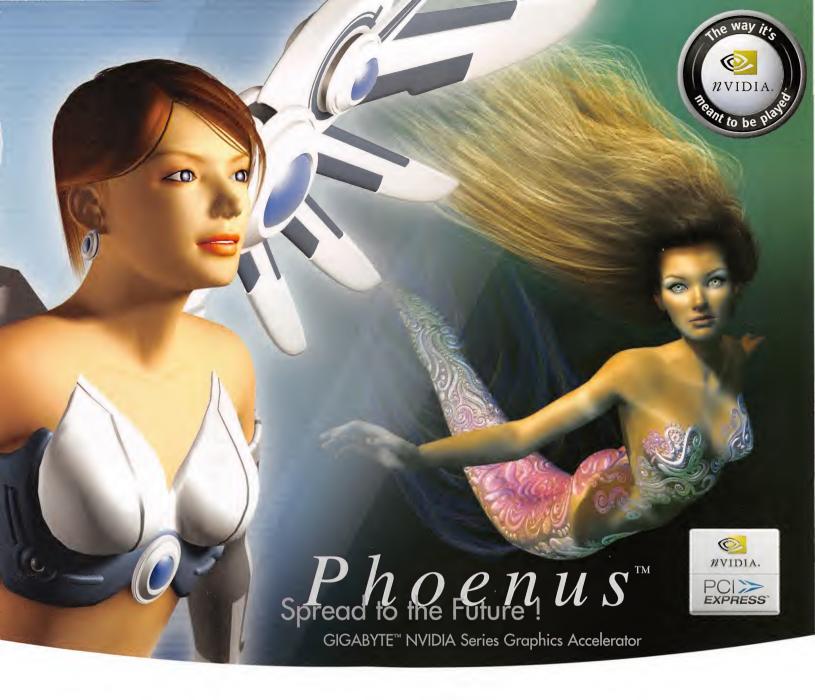
























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### VIVENDI

We picked an unfortunate time to rendezvous at the stand with Vivendi's Australian PR rep. At first we thought the unusually large crowd had assembled for our benefit, but then we spied a short, muscle-bound and shaven-headed guy seated at a table signing autographs. It was Vin Diesel, on hand to promote the excellent Chronicles of Riddick (on Xbox only at this stage) and responsible for making it twice as difficult to navigate the French publisher's

exemplary range of titles. After taking in the delights of Half-Life 2 (plus another glimpse of it across the way at the ATI stand), Tribes Vengeance, World of Warcraft, Men of Valor, Empire Earth 2 and others, we felt confident in declaring Vivendi's booth as the best of the show. A later behind-closed-doors demonstration of Monolith's FEAR only reaffirmed our decision. Well done Vivendi... but just forget about Leisure Suit Larry, ok?

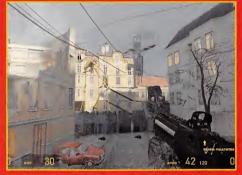


### Half-Life 2

There were two Half-Life 2 theatres at the show - one at Vivendi, the other at ATI. On view at both were clips of in-game footage that illustrated with ample finesse why this is the front-runner for game of the year. (But which year? - Ed.) Curiously, the footage from the dockside map we played earlier this year (see PCPP#100) showed a different take on the environment, with Valve having evidently reworked the level extensively during the past two months. The character interaction is still leagues ahead of anything else, while we can't wait to go head-to-head with a squad of Striders on the streets of City 17.









### **FEAR**

A blistering, white-hot firstperson shooter, FEAR Is the next game from the Monolith team responsible for the exceptional No One Lives Forever series. During the tenminute sequence of in-game footage we witnessed, what impressed most was the unique, cinematic atmosphere - a mix of intense, Hollywood style,

action movie shoot-outs interspersed by genuinely chilling moments from a Japanese horror film. The graphics engine looks more than capable, while the player can perform spectacular melee attacks (leg sweeps and head kicks) if the guns just aren't working for you. In a word: KINETIC



### Empire Earth 2

More than the rehashed and repolished sequel we had feared, Empire Earth 2 is a genuinely all-new title. **Developer Mad Doc Software** (responsible for the Art of Conquest expansion pack) has discarded everything from the original game and started afresh. Of course, it's still a real-time strategy of immense proportions, spanning the entire history of human warfare. Besides the new tech, Mad Doc pians to introduce the idea of territory - for so long a feature of turn-based strategy titles such as Civilization - to the real-time arena. In a word: EPOCHAI







### Tribes Vengeance

It's funny how the only occasions we've been able to play the new Tribes (developed in Canberra by Irrational Games) have been overseas - Singapore, San Francisco, and now Los Angeles. Once more the focus of the demonstration was the multiplayer combat; understandable considering that's what Tribes is renowned for, but it's a little frustrating that we've yet to see much on the vaunted solo campaign. Flying like a trapeze artist with jetpack and grappling hook across alien worlds has never been so much fun. In a word: ROLLICKING







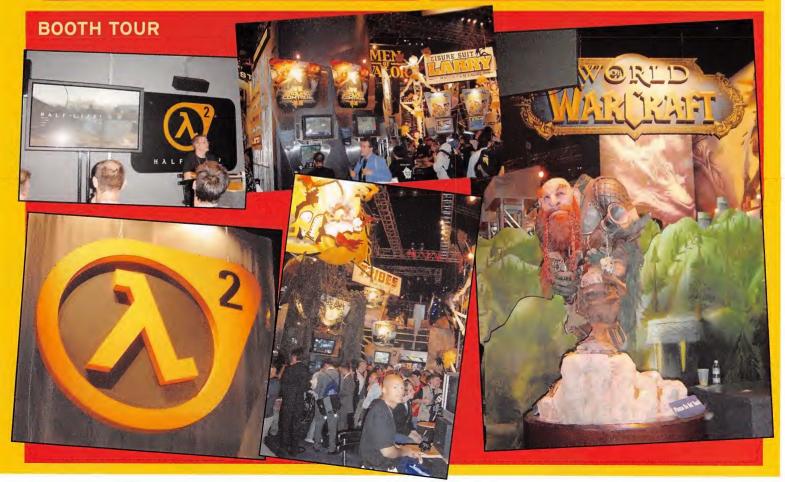
### Men of Valor

This is what 2015 has been working on since Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (except for those guys who formed Infinity Ward and made Call of Duty, that is). It's a shooter set during the Vietnam War (you're fighting against the Vietcong, in case you were wondering) and purports to "tell it like it was" - meaning swear words and racist overtones, apparently. Compared to some other 'Nam shooters we saw, Men of Valor appears superior, particularly impressive were the size and scale of the environments. In a word: GRITTY

### **World of Warcraft**

For a game scheduled for release later this year, there's still an awful lots of unknowns surrounding Blizzard's push into the MMO arena. For a start, when guizzed about PvP combat, the developers are still assessing how it's going to be implemented - it's not in the beta at present, casting doubt on whether it'll make the final cut at all. Of course, as an MMO, you can easily "patch" it later. There are more unknowns concerning the chance of a local release (and a local server), something Vivendi and Telstra are working on right now. In a word: CRAFTY





### ACCLAIM

Set away from the main halls, Acclaim's booth was a refreshing change from the noisy strobefest that we'd endured for three days. Not only was the booth much quieter and less brain pummelling than the rest, the games on offer were also much more soothing on the brain. Not that they intended to be, it's just that they came off as a little, well, average. Nothing distinctly shocking, but also nothing that made us want to grab the demo guy and get a thorough PR rant. Oh well, here's hoping that when the games on display are released that we'll be pleasantly surprised.

### **Juiced**

The car modding scene is like the Vietnam War - every game developer this side of Uzbekistan is making a game about it. Juiced is the latest racer to delve into

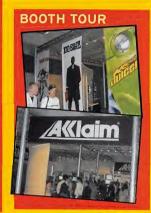




this illegal racing scene, and has one key point of difference. While Need for Speed Underground and its many clones seem happy to remain arcade racers, Julced claims to attack the genre from the simulation angle. Which to hardcore gamers like us is a bloody good thing. Oh yeah, it's also got extra glowy neon bits under the cools exteriors. Fully Shick Mayte!







### NC SOFT

And here we have the only major stand at the show devoted entirely to online games, or to be precise, massively multiplayer online roleplaying games, MMOs are big in Korea, so you would expect a Korean developer and publisher to be big on MMOs. NC Soft's neatly compartmentalised booth failed to disappoint nor rule out the potential for more Koreans dying in LAN cafes. In one corner there was Auto Assault (a Mad Max MMO - see page 18 for more info); in another there was City of Villains (the add-on for City of Heroes); in yet another there was Tabula Rasa (Richard Garriott's new MMO project); in the final quadrant was Guild Wars (a fantasy MMO); and in the middle of it all was Lineage 2 (another MMO - see our review on page 78). When we got back to Sydney, we called Telstra to see if they'd laid cables through our street yet. They hadn't.

### City of Villains

You see, the trouble with being a hero is that you have to be so bloody nice all the time. Sure you can gang up with heroic friends and biff-twack-and-kapow all manner of unsavoury Al enemies, but there comes a time when all this cooperation starts to grate on your nerves. This is where the first expansion pack for City of Heroes comes in: you can create a super-villain for some tasty, superpowered player-versus-player thuggery. In a word: DIABOLICAL





### Tabula Rasa

To be honest we're increasingly having difficulty telling these things apart. From Richard Garriott's (aka Lord British) Destination Games comes Tabula Rasa, yet another fantasy themed MMO. Albeit this time there's some sci-fi elements thrown into the mix (kinda like the Ultima games, but even more pronounced). Garriott speaks of eliminating (or, to be fair, reducing) the amount of "grind" players have to endure to progress, but we're pretty sure we've heard someone say that before. Quite how this will be achieved remains a mystery at this stage. Oh, and just like in Everquest 2, you'll be able to communicate with other players via mic and headset.









### **LUCASARTS**

This booth might as well have been called the StarWarsArts, as nearly every game on show was based on this license to print money. Surprisingly enough we walked out of there with our expectations turned on their heads -Republic Commando looked woeful, a stark contrast compared to our high

expectations, while Battlefront wasn't the abominable mess we thought it would be, even when running on the consoles! Surprisingly the PC version of Battlefront wasn't to be found in the invitation only LucasArts stand - we stumbled upon it at the ATI booth. Thank god we did, as this is actually

looking to be a cool little Battlefield clone, albeit on a much smaller scale than DICE's multiplayer success story. As far as stands go, this one kinda blew - it was small, hard to get into, and had no chicks dressed up as Leia in her golden Jabba bikini. Damn it. (But it had Stormtroopers - Ed.)

### Republic Commando

Demoed on the Xbox, we were quite impressed by the pretty character models on display, and the fluid motion of their movements. The same couldn't be said of the boring and linear level design, which was seriously some of the most snoozeinducing pathways we've had to endure. The tactical element of the game looks incredibly simplistic, with very limited options for controlling your team mates. Here's hoping that the gameplay gets a stormtrooper sized kick up the butt soon. In a word: YAWN





### **Battlefront**

After reading 13 gazillion previews on the game, you've probably got a good idea of what Battlefront is all about. And if you're like us, you were expecting it to suck harder than Jar Jar Binks. Well, the good news is that it's looking pretty damn good. Screenshots can't do the graphics engine justice, which has a very Battlefield Vietnam look to it, only it's even better. Watching AT-ST walkers blowing away Ewoks amidst a hail of glowing laser bolts was a sight that gamers have been craving for too long. We only wish that 64 players could duke it out, rather than the 32 that is the current limit.

In a word: COOL

### Jump to Lightspeed

If we ever see the release of Star Wars Galaxies over here, we might just get to see this expansion pack, Jump to Lightspeed. It looks very different to SWG, having more in common with X-Wing vs Tie Fighter than the Star Wars Everquest clone. From what we saw it's looking great, with gorgeous visuals depicting massive battles between all of your favourite Star Wars aircraft. However, it does appear to have been dumbed down a little bit, with less of the system management that played such a large part in Tie Fighter. In a word: TIE-FIGHTER!























### KOTOR 2

Think KOTOR with a new storyline and several dozen new force powers, and that's KOTOR 2. Which is more than enough for fans of the original, and there seem to be plenty of them. The same engine is being used again, although this time around they've added some cool weather effects. The highlight of our demo was seeing lightning go off in the distance - doesn't sound like much, but this isn't the type of game that demos well at E3. In a word: SEQUE









# SHOW WRAP

Voted on by a host of publications, the E3 Critics Awards have come to represent the arbiter of what was cool at each year's event. While the categories span all platforms - not just PC - we figure they're interesting enough to warrant mention here. We also thought, since the winners would be decided a week after we send to print, we'd have a go at predicting the eventual outcome of each category. We will print the results next issue and you can see how many we got right!

### THE OFFICIAL E3 AWARDS

### **Best of Show**

- Half-Life 2 (Valve/Vivendi Universal Games for PC)
- Halo 2 (Bungie/Microsoft for Xbox)
- Nintendo DS (Mobile Gaming System Nintendo Co. Ltd)
- Sony PSP (Mobile Gaming System Sony Computer Entertainment)
- Splinter Cell 3 (UbiSoft Montreal/UbiSoft for PC)
   WE PREDICT: Half-Life 2 can't win two years in a row, so, er... PSP perhaps?

### **Best Original Game**

- Destroy All Humans! (Pandemic/THQ for PlayStation 2, Xbox)
- Donkey Kong Jungle Beat (Nintendo for GameCube)
- God of War (SCEA Santa Monica/SCEA for PlayStation 2)
- Jade Empire (Bioware/Microsoft for Xbox)
- Yoot Saito's Odama (Vivarium/Nintendo for GameCube)
   WE PREDICT: Jungle Beat. You can't beat conga drums. Well, you can.



### Best PC Game

- Half-Life 2 (Valve/Vivendi Universal Games for PC)
- Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle Earth (EALA/Electronic Arts for PC)
- Rome: Total War (Creative Assembly/Activision for PC)
- Sims 2 (Maxis/Electronic Arts for PC)
- Splinter Cell 3 (UbiSoft Montreal/UbiSoft for PC)
   WE PREDICT: Splinter Cell 3 for taking us by surprise.

### **Best Console Game**

- God of War (SCEA Santa Monica/SCEA for PlayStation 2)
- Halo 2 (Bungie/Microsoft for Xbox)
- Jade Empire (Bioware/Microsoft for Xbox)
- Metroid Prime 2: Echoes (Retro Studios/Nintendo for GameCube)
- Resident Evil 4 (Capcom for GameCube) WE PREDICT: Halo 2. Scarily good.

### Best Peripheral / Hardware

- Alienware Video Array Technology (Alienware for PC)
- Donkey Konga Bongo Drums (Nintendo for GameCube)
- Nintendo DS (Mobile Gaming System Nintendo Co. Ltd)
- Phantom Gaming Service (Infinium Labs, Inc.)
- Sony PSP (Mobile Gaming System Sony Computer Entertainment)
   WE PREDICT: PSP again. It's just so sexy.



### **Best Action Game**

- Doom 3 (Vicarious Visions/id/Activision for Xbox)
- F.E.A.R. (Monolith Productions/Vivendi Universal Games for PC)
- Half-Life 2 (Valve/Vivendi Universal Games for PC)
- Halo 2 (Bungie/Microsoft for Xbox)
- Metroid Prime 2: Echoes (Retro Studios/Nintendo for GameCube)
   WE PREDICT: We suspect not enough people saw FEAR,
   so we'll go for Halo 2.

### Best Action/Adventure Game

- God of War (SCEA Santa Monica/SCEA for PlayStation 2)
- Prince of Persia 2 (UbiSoft Montreal/UbiSoft for All Systems)
- Resident Evil 4 (Capcom for GameCube)
- Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal (Insomniac Games/SCEA for PlayStation 2)
- Splinter Cell 3 (UbiSoft Montreal/UbiSoft for PC)
  WE PREDICT: Splinter Cell 3 easily.

### **Best Fighting Game**

- Def Jam: Fight for New York
   (EA Canada/EA for All Console Systems)
- Guilty Gear Isuka (Arc System Works/Sammy Studios for PlayStation 2)
- Mortal Kombat: Deception (Midway Games for PlayStation 2/Xbox)
- Rumble Roses (KCET/Konami for PlayStation 2)
- Street Fighter Anniversary Collection
   (Capcom for PlayStation 2/Xbox)
   WE PREDICT: Absolutely no idea, but Joel really liked
   Rumble Roses.

### Best Role Playing Game

- Fable (Big Blue Box/Microsoft for Xbox)
- Final Fantasy XII (Square-Enix for PlayStation 2)
- Jade Empire (Bioware/Microsoft for Xbox)
- Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords (Obsidian/LucasArts for PC/Xbox)
- Vampire: The Masquerade Bloodlines
   (Troika Games/Activision for PC)
   WE PREDICT: FFXII will win, but we'd give it to Vampire.





### Best Racing Game

- Burnout 3 (Criterion Games/Electronic Arts for PlayStation 2/Xbox)
- Enthusia Professional Racing (Konami for PlayStation 2)
- Forza Motorsport (Microsoft for Xbox)
- Gran Turismo 4 (Polyphony Digital/Sony Computer Entertainment for PlayStation 2)
- Street Racing Syndicate (Eutechnyx/Namco for All Console Systems)
   WE PREDICT: Burnout 3 for being utterly insane.

### **Best Simulation Game**

- Full Spectrum Warrior (Pandemic/THQ for PC/Xbox)
- Pacific Fighters (1C/UbiSoft for PC)
- Sims 2 (Maxis/Electronic Arts for PC)
- The Movies (Lionhead Studios/Activision for All Platforms)
- The Urbz: Sims in the City
   (Maxis/Electronic Arts for All Console Systems)
   WE PREDICT: Sims 2 for being unexpectedly good.

### Best Sports Game

- ESPN NFL 2005 (Visual Concepts/ESPN Videogames for PS2/Xbox)
- FIFA Soccer 2005 (EA Sports/Electronic Arts for All Platforms)
- Madden NFL 2005 (EA Sports/Electronic Arts for All Platforms)
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005
   (EA Sports/Electronic Arts for All Platforms)
- Tony Hawkis Underground 2
   (Neversoft/Activision for All Platforms)
   WE PREDICT: The voting panel is mainly American so we'll go for Madden.

### Best Strategy Game

- Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle Earth (EALA/Electronic Arts for PC)
- Pikmin 2 (Nintendo for GameCube)
- Rome: Total War (Creative Assembly/Activision for PC)
- Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War (Relic/THQ for PC)
   WE PREDICT: It's gotta be Rome, but why only four nominees?

### Best Puzzle/Trivia/Parlor Game

- Donkey Konga (Nintendo for GameCube)
- Donkey Kong Jungle Beat (Nintendo for GameCube)
- EyeToy: AntiGrav
  - (Harmonix Music Systems/SCEA for PlayStation 2)
- Karaoke Revolution Volume 2
- (Harmonix Music Systems/Konami for PlayStation 2)
   WarioWare, Inc. DS (Nintendo for Nintendo DS)
- WarioWare, Inc. DS (Nintendo for Nintendo DS)
   WE PREDICT: Jungle Beat again.
   But WarioWare has a strong chance.

### Best Online Multiplayer Game

- Battlefield 2 (Digital Illusions/EA Games for PC)
- EverQuest II (Sony Online Entertainment for PC)
- Halo 2 (Bungie/Microsoft for Xbox)
- Star Wars Battlefront
  - (Pandemic Studios/LucasArts for PC, PS2, Xbox)
- World of Warcraft (Blizzard/Vivendi Universal Games for PC)
   WE PREDICT: Very tough but maybe World of Warcraft.

### PCPP'S PICKS

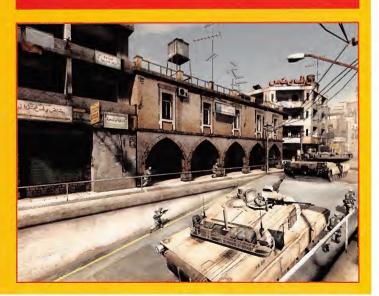
### DAVID'S DELIGHTS

- HALF-LIFE 2 If I could choose to play any game in the world right now, it would be this. Valve seems to understand gameplay like few other developers.
- 2. VAMPIRE: BLOODLINES I'm a sucker for a good action-RPG... and this looks very much like being a genuinely great roleplaying experience with the attraction of super-sweet and ultraseedy visuals.
- 3. BLACK & WHITE 2 I was as disappointed as anyone by the original, but Lionhead appears to have removed all the tedium and replaced it with intriguing gameplay.
- 4. FEAR Scarier than Doom 3. Cooler than Splinter Cell 3. More intense than United Offensive. Well, I only saw ten minutes of footage but I was blown away.
- **5. SIMS 2** Forgive me, for I have Simmed. Like B&W2, all the tedium's gone, though here the soap opera remains. An eminently playable sandbox of a game.



### BENNETT'S BENCHMARKS

- 1. Half Life 2 Dammit, I really wanted to disagree with David and be all cynical and shit, but he's right this game looks bloody amazing.
- 2. Battlefield 2 Sure, I'm totally biased as Desert Combat is my favourite game, but this is everything that Team Fortress 2 promised to be, plus a whole lot more.
- 3. Splinter Cell 3 The graphics whore within couldn't help but be amazed at the deliciously realistic graphics, while the co-op multiplayer looks like it's going to be a ball when played with a pal.
- 4. Sims 2 I hate The Sims, but I've got to hand it to Maxis this is looking to be a revolutionary game experience, yet still retain the accessibility of the original.
- 5. Silent Hunter III There just ain't enough sims being released these days, so it's reassuring to see that Silent Hunter III is looking so damn good.





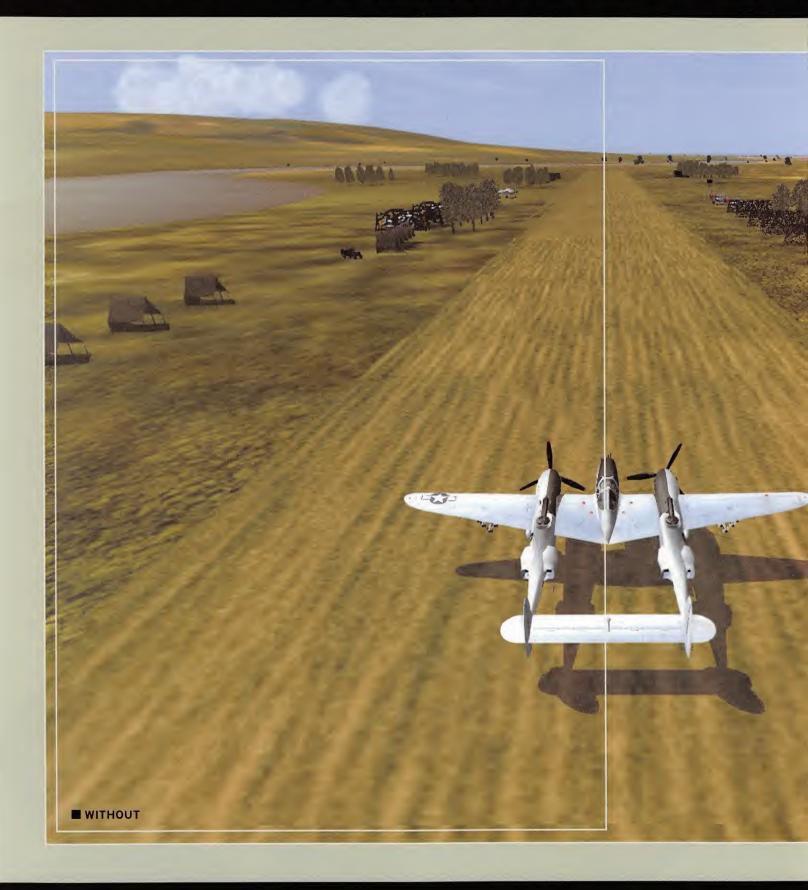


Your equipment holding you back?





# SO SILOUT



# 



Games have to look great, and the more believable and realistic they are, the better.

TEXTURE FILTERING

is a technique used to assist in enhancing visual quality and fine detail. James Bannan goes sub-pixel to take a look.

nen you play a game with any kind of 3D image (and that's pretty much all of them), you're looking at the effect of LOTS of textures. Each texture has two values, known as texels, which are applied to the polygons which make up every surface. These are like a layer of paint over the flat polygon. To achieve complex effects like bump mapping, transparency, translucency, reflection and refraction, multiple textures are often applied to the same surface.

Needless to say, this involves a fair amount of extra information being pumped through the graphics card. A basic texture would only be around 512 bits in length. Take a 3D image in a game which has 40,000 polygons on the screen at any given time, and

apply one texture per polygon. That's around 2MB of texture information per frame. Now go for a basic framerate of 30fps – that's 60MB of texture information per second. That's a LOT of data. And that's only a basic example – textures in today's games can be 1-2 kB in size, the poly counts are higher, the detail is greater and the frame rates are MUCH higher (if you're lucky enough to own a beast of a video card!).

So, due to memory restrictions, textures cannot be infinite in scope. It would be great if they were because, as with real-life textures, as you zoom in ever-closer you would see finer and finer detail, and playing a game would be like looking through a window. However, the reality is that as you zoom in on a 3D image all you're likely to see is granularity, as the pixelation

The image on the left is a great example of the benefits of anisotropic filtering. At first glance it's hard to see much of a difference, but if you look towards the end of the runway, as well as the hills near the horizon, you'll see that the textures are much more blurred when lower levels of texture filtering are used.

it also highlights the smoothing out of the 'barriers' between each level of texture detail - without AF and trilinear filtering, it's very easy to see where each new layer of texture detail begins.

# TEXTURE FILTERING

Point Sampling Bilinear Filtering Trilinear Filtering (2x trilinear)

Pixel Co-ordinates Texel

Sampled Texel

Filtering methods compared. You can see how the line boundary is quite marked in point sampling, and is simply blurred in bilinear. Trilinear sorts out the problem, while AF improves on the visual quality up to the vanishing point.

ANISOTROPIC FILTERING IN ACTION

None 2x 4x 8x 16x

The jump in quality from Ox to 2x is huge, especially in the foreground, but it doesn't noticeably improve beyond 4x. The enhancements made above 4x are mostly to the background, where the pixels are squashed up and blurred. 16x has it pretty much sorted

becomes more obvious. Additionally, when you zoom out of the same image, background textures start squashing together and being randomly displayed, producing a blurred, hazy effect like a sun mirage. These visual discrepancies are called artefacts.

Altering the screen resolution won't help, as texture information is pre-defined, but there are techniques available to reduce the problem of artefacts. Using mip-maps is a common method. This involves creating multiple copies of each texture at different resolutions. Each copy has an optimal working resolution, so whichever resolution is used, the most appropriate texture is applied. This works fine for a given range of resolutions, but zoom in enough and you'll eventually still get pixelation. Another option is to use texture compression which allows high-res textures to be used, and then losslessly scaled down to lower resolutions. This is a good method, but again just delays the inevitable pixelation.

This is where texture filtering comes into play. Similar to antialiasing, filtering works by sampling each texture several times and then blending the samples. In the same way that AA works to smooth jagged lines through an effective illusion, texture filtering gives the impression of greater texture depth and detail. It also results in a performance hit, as each image takes more processing power to render.

The memory impact is different from AA, however. AA samples each visible pixel on the screen, and the higher the resolution and the higher the AA setting and the higher the resolution, the greater the amount of memory used. Filtering just samples the texture, so the memory hit tends to scale in line with the complexity of the image, as the more complex the image, more polygons are used and more textures are applied.

### **Filtering Flavours**

Is there only one way to filter a texture? Why no - that'd be too easy! There are a few, each with their own pros and cons (although some only have cons, bless 'em).

Point sampling is probably the first attempt at texture filtering, and is subsequently the worst by today's standards (and is therefore unused), but the logic was there. Totally software-driven, point sampling works by examining a texture and attempting to scale it as the

perspective moves towards it or draws away. If a texture was being scaled to 80% of the original, point sampling would read the colour value of the first pixel, write that to the new texture, then move 80% of the pixel's width (or height) and read the next colour value.

The inherent problem should already be apparent – if you move 80% along the width of a pixel you're still on the original pixel, so the new texture at 80% would have its first two pixels exactly the same colour. This flaw would continue through the redraw, and is certainly visible to the eye.

Bilinear filtering is the simplest hardware-driven method of texture filtering. It works by sampling the closest four texels to the pixel currently being drawn, and blending them together. This effectively produces a slightly blurred texture which looks fine most of the time. However, surfaces which are angled sharply away from the viewing perspective have fewer pixels (and

### Texture filtering gives the impression of greater texture depth and detail

therefore texels) to sample, and so the texture blend is based on sampling which is likely to be increasingly inaccurate.

Bilinear filtering works well in conjunction with mip-maps, but it produces a unique artifact when the surface angle changes quickly from shallow to steep - the filtered mipmaps on the shallow surface are quite sharp and clear, and form a visible boundary with the mip-maps on the sharp surface, which appear blurry. Trilinear filtering is based on the same idea as bilinear filtering (duh!), but is designed to get around the mip-mapping boundary artefact (sounds like a gangsta rap award, doesn't it?). It works by taking bilinear samples of the two nearest mip-map levels to the pixel being drawn. This equates to 8 samples taken per pixel which is, of course, more memory intensive than simple bilinear filtering. It serves to smooth the transition of angled textures, although the blur created by the bilinear sampling remains.

# ATI OXAF TRILINEAR FILTERING

Figure 3.2

Figure 3.1

### ATI 8xAF TRILINEAR FILTERING



Not much difference, is there? On a reasonably shallow slope, ATI doesn't care too much about texture filtering. The quality is already pretty good, and diverting unnecessary resources to this area is inefficient.

# TEXTURE FILTERING

Anisotropic filtering is designed to do the work of the other two methods. as well as get rid of the distance blur. To do this, it is based on a non-linear filtering pattern. Linear filtering, which the previous two methods are based on, works on the assumption that the object being sampled is isotropic, or has equal vector values, such as a square or an equilateral triangle. As its name suggests, anisotropic filtering is based on an object of unequal vector values. For ease of calculation, this is typically a rectangle, although it can really be anything. The more complex the base object, the more processing is required and the better the result can be.

AF takes either bilinear or trilinear (depending on the settings) texture samples of each rendered pixel, and will take extra samples based on the angle of the object. If the object is sharply angled, AF will take mores sample along the slope of that object to gather as much texel information as possible to render the pixel properly.

AF settings usually come in magnitudes ranging from 2X to 16X for high-end cards. This relates to the number of texture samples being made per pixel.

(See p62, figure 1 for various texture filtering methods)

# AF in gaming – should vou bother?

Ask a gamer whether they'd be willing take a performance hit, and they'll look around, expecting to see the men in white suits run up to haul you away, you poor, deranged fool.

...however, if you're already running at around 90 fps, would you consider trading enhanced image quality for a drop to 80 fps? Your eye can barely tell the difference in framerates anyway, so perhaps it's worth considering.

The truth is that you need fairly heavy amounts of AF to make a noticeable impact on image quality in your games, and up until recently, video cards would groan and labour under the added burden of sampling each texture 8 times per pixel. Performance drop was noticeable and the trade-off really wasn't worth it.

However, now we have brand spanking-new video cards out which crunch data like nothing before, and enabling high levels of AF (and AA, for that matter) is becoming a worthwhile option without hurting performance greatly. Take a look at the angled

## HOW DO I ENABLE ANISOTROPIC FILTERING?

Many recent games now have the ability to enable AF from their options setting, but it's still not commonplace. The most common method is to activate it at the driver level, via your video card's control panel. Simply right click on the desktop, select properties, settings, and then advanced. You'll then need to select the tab that has your video card's image quality settings, which varies between NVIDIA and ATI. As well as being able to set the AF level between OX and 16X, you can also set it to quality or performance mode. We recommend trying performance mode, as this provides excellent filtering quality at the least performance hit. 8XAF seems to be the most commonly used level of AF, as it's a nice tradeoff between quality and performance.

letters image. The effect of AF is readily apparent here, and the image quality does increase dramatically at each new setting. Enabling AF even to the 4X level is going to enhance the visual enjoyment in gaming considerably. (See p62, figure 2 for a clear real world example)

However, before voting yea or nay, it's worth looking at how each manufacturer deals with AF.

### ATI's Approach

ATI uses an adaptive approach to AF. When a polygon is being created, the setup engine on the card calculted the amount of slope on the polygon face which is to be textured. This information is passed through to the pixel engine. AF will then be applied (assuming it is needed) up to the number of samples specified by the driver (2X, 4X etc). The sampling

### THERE'S ALWAYS A PRICE





These results show that ATI's more selective approach results in a lower performance hit than NVIDIA's brute force approach

### **NVIDIA OXAF TRILINEAR FILTERING**



Urgh, un-filtered textures just don't do it for us...

### **NVIDIA 8XAF TRILINEAR FILTERING**



Here there's a noticeable different, especially in the foreground. NVIDIA have applied AF to every polygon.

pattern - standard rectangular - is unchanged during each operation.

ATI drivers have a Performance and Quality AF setting. The Performance setting uses bilinear filtering, while the Quality setting uses trilinear. So, at 2X Quality, ATI AF will take 8 samples per pixel, or 4 samples at 2X Performance.

ATI's approach is really something of a trade-off between quality and performance. AF is applied where the card thinks it is needed the most, and leaves other areas alone. Performance is generally better at the higher levels, and quality is usually pretty good across the board.

The screenshots from UT2004 demonstrate this. There's not a huge increase in quality of detail from 0X to 8X, but the slope isn't that steep, either. In-game trilinear filtering has already been applied, and ATI doesn't consider that surface to need much more.

(See p63 figure 3.1 and 3.2)

### **NVIDIA's approach**

Interestingly, NVIDIA also uses adaptive AF, but whereas ATI makes a judgment call as to the best areas to apply AF based on polygon slope, NVIDIA alters its sampling pattern instead.

NVIDIA's sampling pattern is a four-sided polygon, which is altered depending on the degree of slope

### AF works quietly in the background, smoothing out important things which affect focus and depth of field

calculated. Full trilinear sampling is performed per pixel, up to the maximum number of samples determined by the driver settings.

This is more of a "you WILL be smooth, damn it!" approach to texture shading. Image quality is good, AF is applied to the whole image and accordingly there's an increased performance hit.

Again, the UT2004 shots show this. The angle of the slope is the same as the ATI shots, but the change in detail from 0X to 8X is much more noticeable. Filtering has been forced on the surface, and sure it looks good, but how's it going to be perform?

(See figure 4.1 and 4.2)

### So who's better?

Trying to directly compare the two methods of AF is tricky, as they really do use different approaches and different algorithms to achieve their results. Looking at the screenshots from UT2004, it does seem that NVIDIA provides a slightly higher image quality at the 8X setting, but at what cost?

Well, this is where the benchmarks come in and speak volumes. ATI's balanced approach to AF results in a higher framerate than NVIDIA at most resolutions, but more importantly, the ATI benchmarks show a minimal performance hit across the resolution range. At 1600x1200, the Radeon 9800XT only loses 28 frames in the transition from 0X to 16X AF in UT2004, and still comes in at 70 fps, which is ample for lightning-fast gaming. The X800XT does even better, only dropping 5 frames in UT2004, and 2 frames in Far Cry.

Compare that with NVIDIA's performance, where the GeForceFX 5950 matches the Radeon 9800XT until it maxxes out at 8X AF, and the GeForce 6800 drops over 30 frames in UT2004 and 22 frame in Far Cry. Of course the framerates at 16X are still playable, but it's quite clear that ATI handles the memory load much better at speed.

Image quality in this case is not really worth arguing about. At 16X AF, the noticeable texture artifacts have been all but eradicated by both

methods, and the only way you could tell the difference would be to capture each frame and zoom in to 300X magnification...and who plays their games like that? You're left with the fact that NVIDIA got there the hard way, while ATI has barely raised a sweat.

### The final analysis

Framerates have been pretty good for a while - the new push is for image quality and photorealism during games, and anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering are primary technologies to help achieve this. Games are being designed with intricate texture detail, and considering that the graphics cards now available can handle it, it would be a shame not to take full advantage. The human eye is a finicky instrument, and easily picks up little flaws...even if we're not sure exactly what's wrong with a picture, our eyes will tell us that all is not right. AF works quietly in the background, smoothing out important things which affect focus and depth of field, both of which are highly important to our own sense of perspective and proportion. So, crank up the AF, and sit back and enjoy the view.

James Bannan wrote our exclusive X800XT review in PCPP 101.

# GAMES IN REVIEW

t's been a joyous few weeks, rekindling (if you'll forgive the pun) my affair with the Thief series. As Eliot writes over the next few pages, Deadly Shadows is an absorbing, immersive and faithful extension of the classic stealth game, brought to vivid life by a mesmerising combination of technical prowess (the real-time lighting) and artistic flair (the stylised environments, the evocative script, the memorable characters and the dazzling cut-scenes). It's what all sequels should be; a magnificent reimagining of the original, utilising cutting-edge technology to heighten the experience in ways we could only dream of when playing its predecessor.

It also ups the ante with some inspired additions; the City sections and persistent economy hammer home (if you'll again forgive the pun) the realisation of a beautifully coherent and consistent world. I still recall with delight the first time I "died" in the City only to wake up mere moments before I hit reload locked in a grimy cell inside Pavelock Prison. Torch carrying guards provide all new degrees of unexpected suspense and often trap the arrogant or unwary thief. Meanwhile the expanded physics modelling creates new avenues of strategy and exploration - killing guards by dropping barrels onto their heads comes highly recommended.

It's interesting to note that one of the key new features Ubisoft wishes to promote with Splinter Cell 3 is its non-linearity, by which one presumes they mean multiple routes and solutions. They should take a look at Thief to see how it's done - Sam



Fisher could learn a lot from Garrett in this respect. If only being a cynical mercenary in leather boots wandering the steampunk streets of the City was as cool and sexy and marketable as Tom Clancy, nearfuture political intrigue and hightech gadgets. But then, maybe Thief wouldn't be quite so special...

David Wildgoose Editor

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### **GOLD AWARD**

### HIGH DISTINCTION

### DISTINCTION

### CREDIT

### PASS

# FAIL



The ultimate accolade. A game that receives a Gold Award is an essential purchase, and the only excuse for not owning it is either not having a powerful enough PC, or not having a PC at all. Or arms. It represents a new direction in gaming, a new benchmark against which all others will be measured. It defines its genre, or creates a new one. It is gaming. You must own it.



This is the finest in gaming. A fresh concept, a perfect execution, a meaningful extension to a tried and tested format, one or all of these are required for this score. We strongly recommend the purchase of each High Distinction game, but extremely fussy gamers may want to skip those HD games that don't also receive Gold Awards.



An intriguing new concept or a bold new direction that manages to pull its new trick off with a reasonable degree of flair. You will be impressed, at either the graphics, the gameplay or some other new element that you may not have encountered before. Or perhaps this is a familiar gaming concept, but one executed so well it's almost - but not quite - an essential purchase.



Solid, playable, largely bug-free, entertaining and maybe even a bit unexpected, these are the hallmarks of a game of Credit. You may have seen it all before, but you won't mind, because a Credit game does what it says on the box - it plays well and it keeps you hooked. An essential purchase? Not necessarily, but worth consideration.



A game that receives a pass is playable, but its concept may be flawed, its extras may be lacking or its graphical enhancements may have fallen off somewhere in a lengthy bug-fixing process. And bugs there may be, although in the end the game will, as we say, work. Purchase if you're curious, but discerning gamers will probably look for something more substantial.



There are more than 5000 games released each year. Some are gems. Some are merely unremarkable. Others are nothing more than a shameless grab for cash. Graphics will be rudimentary and gameplay will be worse. If you see someone considering a game that has failed, gently take them by the elbow and hurl them out of the shop. It's your duty as a good citizen.

90+

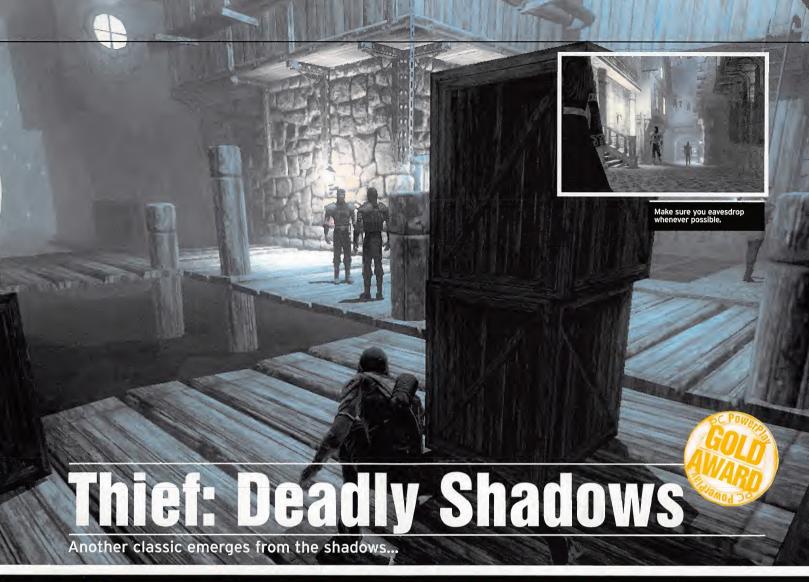
**85-100** 

75-84

65-74

50-64

0-49



Developer: Ion Storm Austin ■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Distributor: Atari ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Available: Now

he choice is not only between one action or another. To refrain from action is the third potential." These wise words from the Keepers will ring in your ears until the Thief: Deadly Shadows credits roll and you slump back in your chair exhausted, sapped and exhilarated. No other game series has made avoiding action so incredibly engaging and challenging, and Thief: Deadly Shadows continues this legacy of the First Person Sneaker with such style and subtle artistry that it easily ranks as one of the most memorable PC games you're likely to play this year.

### DID I JUST HEAR SOMETHING? HELLO?

Deserving of special mention is the incredible sound in Deadly Shadows. The music, sound effects and voice acting are unparalleled. All combined, they play a major role in maintaining the amazing mood that pervades the whole Deadly Shadows experience, Stephen Russell is, once again, flawless as Garrett - and there's far more narration and cutscene work for him to do this time around. You will never, ever, skip anything Garrett has to say in the mission briefings, because the delivery is that good. The soundtrack is also suitably creepy, and blended with the eerie sound effects in some levels (Shalebridge is quite remarkable) you'll be jumping out of your skin at times. Play with the lights off, and sound up loud. It's a must.

"I have thrown away my box of troubles..."

No doubt many of you are anxious to know whether Thief: Deadly Shadows reaches the very high bar set by its two predecessors, Thief: The Dark Project and Thief: The Metal Age, both developed by the now defunct Looking Glass Studios. Well, Ion Storm Austin's Deadly Shadows team, headed up by project director, Randy Smith (who has been a designer on all Thief games so far), and Lead Designer, Jordan Thomas, admit to having more than a few hardcore Thief fans amongst their ranks (Warren Spector himself, obviously) and it clearly shows in this remarkable game they've made. Deadly Shadows is well and truly a valid successor, if not even better than The Metal Age. The core Thief gameplay is intact, and in some respects it's better than ever.

Certainly, in terms of story, Deadly Shadows very much rounds off the tale that begun in The Dark Project, as it finally addresses the mystery of the Keepers. We've dealt with the Trickster, the Pagans and the Hammerites, so it's only natural that Deadly Shadows takes us into the forbidden sanctum of the Keepers and their cryptic prophecies. But we'll stop there... this review isn't going to tell

you a damn thing about the story, because it's the way this tale unrayels that makes Deadly Shadows the masterful game that it is. It all starts out fairly innocently (well, as innocently as the daily tasks of Garrett, the master thief, can get), but the longer you play, the deeper you go, the more you involve yourself... eventually, there's no turning back. We will say this though - not only is the story brilliantly told, but the character of Garrett remains consistent throughout. He's not just someone who'll blindly be shoved from one mission to the next. This game is so well written, you'll cheer with delight during the beautifully animated cutscenes (which, on the whole, are as creepy and poetic as those in Thief: The Dark Project).

It's just so much fun to be Garrett. There's been talk, good and bad, regarding the introduction of the third person camera, but the first person view is on by default, and you never even need look at the third person view if it doesn't suit your playing style. However, the third person view is surprisingly alluring - you get to appreciate a lot of the lighting effects as they drape across Garrett, as well as see some cool animations - but for some it may lessen the immersion. First person really thrusts you head first (ho

### SYSTEM

### NEED

PIV 1.5GHz (or Athlon equivalent) 256MB RAM 64MB video card (Direct3D 9.0, Pixel Shader 1.1) Windows XP or 2000 ONLY

### WANT

PIV 2.0Ghz or higher 512MB RAM 128MB video card

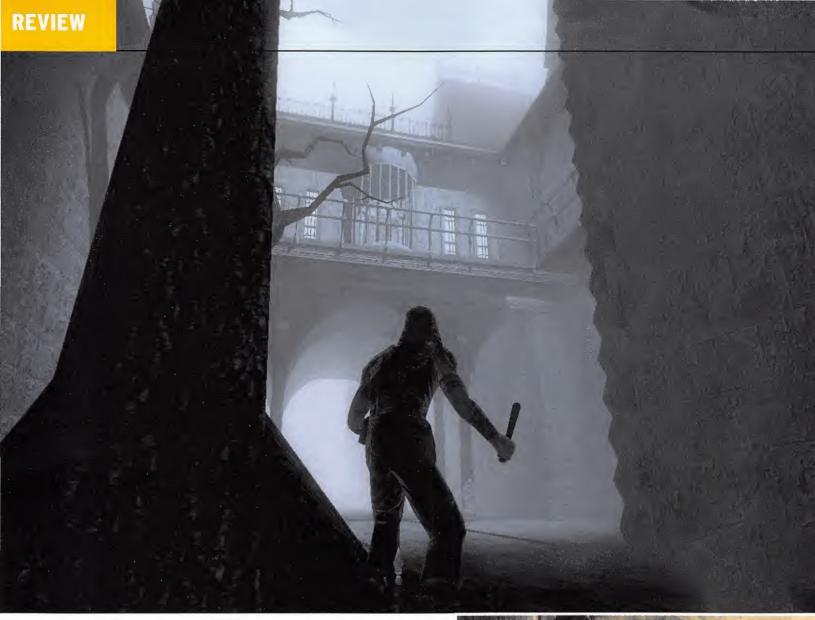
### MULTIPLAYER

IAO

### num namet oa

A master thief qualifies as a metal detector, wouldn't you say? A precious metal detector, at least.

Thief is a very special game... no other game on the market can offer the same kind of experience



ho) into the world of The City, and helps you forget you're just playing a game.

Because Garrett's character model permanently exists in the world, the first person view feels very odd at first. This is because the camera view is attached to Garrett's head, so as you move about the world, the camera bobs and jiggles with the character model's movements. There's no doubt it feels odd at first. "Sticky" is probably a good word. As you move Garrett with the

### **DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?**

Deadly Shadows is a very, very pretty game. If you get up really close to things they get a bit ugly, but sitting in the corner of a room and staring back down a hallway as the silvery glow of moonlight comes in through a window and small dust particles float in the air, only to spot a guard carrying a flickering torch that illuminates the stony walls as he makes his way towards you... it's breathtaking at times. For the record, we played Deadly Shadows on a 3.0GHz machine with a Radeon 9800 Pro and the game ran flawlessly on 1280x1024 with all high details - and bloom - turned on. Not a single crash. Note that you can't use multisampling and Bloom at the same time, and we strongly suggest you leave Bloom on it makes the game look 50% better.

keyboard it feels as if there's a subtle drag to his movements. But you get used to it extremely quickly, and a few missions in, you'll believe it actually feels more realistic. Unlike other first person games, you're not floating, drifting or cruising through the level - you actually feel the weight of Garrett's movements as you scuffle over behind a barrel or climb up onto a ledge. Look down and you'll see Garrett's legs, feet, hands and whatever he's carrying in them. Bloomin' heck, you ARE Garrett! A small gripe, though - Run is the default movement speed, requiring you to hold down the Walk or Creep key in order to move stealthily. Why can't there be a toggle? Luckily, you can switch to crouch mode with the X key, and movement whilst crouching is much the same as creeping, so you can get around in this mode without suffering cramps.

Later in the game you'll slip your hands into the sexy climbing gloves that allow you to jump and stick to any stony surface like Spider-Man. Crawl out of harm's way, or go looking for mossy arrowheads under the gutters...You don't need to use the gloves that often in the game, but when you do, it makes Garrett seem even cooler - if that's possible. Sometimes it's fun to just explore up the side of building for kicks. Rope arrows? I didn't even notice they were missing.

The new loot glint and arrow trails that worried some fans for being too "gamey" are so subtle in Deadly Shadows



that you'll hardly even notice them. Loot glint is actually incredibly useful. As you slink into a room and pause for a moment, you get a quick overview of what in the room is valuable. The glint is not all that obvious and only twinkles every few seconds, still requiring the player to be as observant as possible. Play on Expert and you'll still find yourself scouring a level over and over for that final piece of special loot.

"My Life as a Guard, by Me... nah, boring..."

Level design is, on the whole, sensational. You'll travel twisted rocky











# ARE YOU A MASTER THIEF OR JUST NORMAL?

The difficulty settings in Deadly Shadows are crucial to your enjoyment of the game. The default setting of Normal is way too easy for anyone who's played a Thief game before. Fans should definitely play on Expert (or at least Hard), in which the levels are more populated, and guards more attuned to what's going on. On Expert, Thief really comes alive. On Normal, getting through levels is a cakewalk and will only take half as long. Playing through the entire game on Expert took something close to 40 hours, if not more. And every second was delicious.

tunnels under the ground, balance precariously from pipes inside a giant clocktower, search the rafters in a cavernous cathedral, and cower in sheer terror in the rotten basement of an abandoned home. Each location feels realistically unpredictable. Deadly Shadows is a true adventure - an epic journey - and the level design (which includes the atmospheric sound) can be thanked for this. If you were worried about loading points, or "small" levels, then slap yourself around the head. Each mission level is only split into two halves, so there's only one loading point between two sides of a castle, for instance. Each area has so much content, that you can happily spend 30 minutes engrossed in gameplay without needing to enter a loading point. Loading screens are more common throughout the City areas (between missions, you can now explore and loot your neighbours), but we can live with it. You're usually far more focused on the tasks at hand. Thanks to the poorly hand-scrawled maps that Garrett gets his hands on, you're never 100% certain about which way you should be headed anyway. There's no auto-map or any other computer game convention to tear you away from the constant observation of your environment. You'll be making decisions based on your own assessment of the architecture - as Garrett would -

and not of a radar or mini-map. It's easy

to get lost in the City, so tread carefully...

As most of your time in Thief is spent lurking under the cover of darkness or out of view, lon Storm have ensured that the AI in the game is up to the task of sniffing you out, or reacting believably to your devious actions. This time around, guards are far more vocal about what they're doing, and their reactions are unscripted - that is, they react on the fly to how you, the player, have altered the game world. Guards make surprisingly accurate remarks such as "I'm going to look behind that barrel" or "what's that over by the door?" They complain if a door has been left open, get angry that a torch or candle has been put out, gasp in horror when they realise that loot has been stolen (sometimes from their very person), get suspicious when they notice that furniture is out of place, or tease you for running away and even try to coax you out of the darkness by pretending to be friendly. They'll even blame each other for things that you've done. The conversations you overhear between characters are some of the cleverest - and funniest - in the entire Thief series.

In terms of combat situations, the AI is more deadly than ever. Garrett is no fighter, and you'll never want to be caught, that's for sure. That said, you have some very cool gadgets to make killing your pursuers more fun that it ever was. Throw down a floor mine in a guard's patrolling

route and wait for the bang, knock them out with a well-timed gas grenade or shatter a vial of oil in their path (and then set it alight with a fire arrow). The AI is not perfect however, and there are sometimes some quirky pathfinding issues. If more than two guards try to squeeze through a doorway at once, they can sometimes get stuck and run on the spot. Some characters will sometimes walk obliviously over objects and momentarily float in the air or stand on chairs instead of sit on them. But these problems are not rampant, and will doubtfully affect your enjoyment. On the whole, the awareness and behaviour of the AI is very impressive and very entertaining.

Thief: Deadly Shadows is a very special PC game, and that's because no other game out on the market can offer the same kind of experience. It fully absorbs you to the point where the game's quirks and flaws (and Thief 1 and 2 had their fair share of flaws too) are very quickly forgiven and shoved into the shadowy background. You'll be more worried about that angry Hammerite who's closing in on your hiding place than on anything else. Other games that offer stealth play - Splinter Cell, for instance - well, they're just games. Thief is real. Or at least, you'll be fooled into thinking it is, and isn't that what matters? Looking Glass would be proud.

**Eliot Fish** 

### RATING



### FOR

Story, atmosphere, stealth play, sound, visuals.

### AGAINST

Controls can feel sticky, some Al pathfinding Issues.

### OVERALL

Deadly Shadows is a game unlike any other and a must play for PC gamers looking for a wholly absorbing experience.





Developer: Rotobee/Deep Silver ■ Publisher: KOCH ■ Distributor: www.gamesuniverse.com.au ■ Price; \$88 ■ Rating: N/A ■ Available: Now

### SYSTEM

NEED P3-1GHZ 256MB RAM 64MB video card 700MB HDD

### WANT

P4-2GHz+ 512MB RAM GeForce4 700MB HDD

### MULTIPLAYER

Nope

### ONLINE

virusingles-bercom Are you single? Do you have a well-adjusted personality and the ability to laugh at your own patheticness? Do you like really ugly people? Go here. irst up, can someone please explain to me why a game which revolves entirely around the sexual antics of a couple in a tiny apartment is called "Singles"?

You'd be forgiven for thinking that in this game you will be able to go out to bars, "flirt up your life", pick up a chick or a guy and then take them home for rumpy pumpy. But no - this is a tedious domestic simulator with a dash of unconvincing sex.

Someone, somewhere, was playing the Sims one day and thought "you know, this game would be much better if you could actually see the guy's flaccid dick." So he (I'm gonna assume it was a he) gathered about himself a talented crew of hack programmers, reverse-engineered the Sims (while failing to understand what



makes the game any good) and pooped out this bizarre combination of boredom, smut and pubic hairstyle gallery.

Second up, you will see nudies in this game. Nudies everywhere, bouncing off the walls, in the shower, in the privacy of their own bedrooms. However, if the nude bodies of your 'singles' excite you in any way whatsoever, go and see a psychiatrist because you may have developed a Barbie doll fetish, and that's just creepy.

### Molested by Ken

Honestly, go and grab a Barbie (I think they cost about \$9.95), pull off all its clothes and with a felt-tip pen scribble in some nipples and a thatch of pubic hair. That's the spit and image of the nude female model in the game.

Unfortunately, you won't be able to do the same thing with a Ken doll, because the boys here do have intricately modelled penises, while as we all know Ken just has a manly bulge.

It's weird - developer Deep Silver (Vibrator reference? You decide.) has put a lot of effort into the knobs but has failed to realise that in order for these 'people' to be at all interesting they should have had bodies that didn't look like department store manikins, they should have worn clothes that obscured rather than revealed their figures, and it should

have been harder for the player to see them nude. You can check out all the 'good bits' in the first ten seconds of the game - just walk into the bedroom and order your single to undress. Very Abu Ghraib I suppose, but hardly romantic.

Actually, romance is what this game truly lacks. There are films out there that can make hard men cry through the sheer intensity of the budding relationship between two characters (Sofia Coppolla's Lost in Translation springs to mind - see it if you're sensitive) but Singles seems to think that two plastic people standing in front of each other waving their hands means "flirting".

### No foreplay

Like the Sims - exactly like the Sims - there are various power bars in the bottom of the screen which reflect each of the two - the only two - characters' current state of mind. There's all the tedious crap like hygiene, hunger, personal surroundings and the esoteric "happiness" but we also find romance, relationship and sensuality on the list. Maximising each power bar involves mind-numbing repetition of mouse-clicks on different objects and different menu options.

Basically, the game is designed to make it as difficult as possible for the two characters to have sex, while inexorably



### **RATING ISSUES**

Singles is self-rated as "suitable only for players 18 years and older" so I'm at a loss to imagine how it will be rated here in Australia. Will they attempt to ban it? Surely not - the sex is about as explicit as forcing two Barbies to mate, and even though the game does feature accurately modelled genitalia, no one actually speaks English so there's no opportunity for kids to be bent by smutty pillow talk. Still, you can probably expect at least some degree of controversy, if Allston or Ruddock ever actually find out the game exists.

### YOUR GENITALS AND YOU

Did you know that your private parts say a lot about your personality? Well, they do if the pink bits on display in this game are anything to go by. For instance, the sleek, stylish guys who think they're really cool all have tiny dicks. And the guys who are rough, groovy surfie or DJ types, you know, in tune with their true selves, have enormous chunks of swinging meat reaching down to the lower thigh. The women too can be told apart by their intimate grooming habits - funky rock chicks have great tangled snarls of pubic hair while the 'elegant' vamp has little more than a landing strip. Do I think this is clever on the part of the developers? I'll give you one guess.

pushing the player into manipulating the two characters into having sex. Frankly, the premise is weird. When I shoot a demon in the face, I know I'm being righteous and good. When I'm a disembodied force which has ripped the roof off a trendy inner-city apartment in order to be able to try and trick two semi-autonomous creatures into copulation, I feel... conflicted.

See, it's not as if you take the role of one of the singles. You can control both of them, swapping back and forth at whim. So you're either using zombie mind-control on two innocent people or, and this is even worse, you're actually TRYING TO HAVE SEX WITH YOURSELF.

### She fell asleep

And what's more, it's BORING. Repetitive, mundane, lacking in any sort of pizzazz. These people are supposed to be falling in love but they never go anywhere! They never do anything except order pizza! Supposedly they have jobs, but this is just an awkward device for generating more money so you can kit out the apartment in increasingly tasteless crap. The singles can improve themselves by working harder and upgrading a set of skills, and better jobs give better money, but in terms of gameplay this means occasionally clicking an upgrade icon and watching your single disappear for part of the day.

Call frances





"Well, hello!"

Yes that's right, sometimes playing this game means looking at an empty apartment while trying to figure out the best way to make two Barbies have sex. Are you feeling creeped out yet? Think about it - you come home to your flat and while you're waiting for your maybegirlfiend-maybe-just-flatmate you become aware of a ghostly presence compelling you to go to the bathroom and take a piss without pulling down your pants... Yes, the character animation is that limited. We all pee sitting down too, in the world of Singles.

### I've got a headache

Of course, getting them to shag each other rotten isn't difficult, just time-consuming. After you've clicked and clicked and clicked they'll eventually share a passionate kiss, and a few more clicks later you can force them into bed. Isn't it against the Geneva Convention to force people to have sex? Of course, it's not like these creatures are actually capable of penetrating each other. If you've ever seen two polygonal characters attempt to kiss you'll realise it's about as squishy as rubbing two Coke-cans together.

In the afterglow, the singles now have a relationship. They're still referred to as singles though - someone at Deep Silver really didn't think this through. Now you've got a relationship, what next? Well, logically, your punishment for forcing these poor creatures to mate is to watch their new relationship slowly

crumble because one of them is too lazy while the other is too shrewish. The built-in character faults of each of the 12 models are all stereotypical and sexist - women are bossy, men are messy.

You can attempt to keep it together by clicking all over the screen at an even more fevered pitch, but once the dirty has been done there's little to look forward to.

### Rainbow bright

The game claims it's possible to match boy-on-boy and girl-on-girl singles but I couldn't figure out how to make this happen. Perhaps its some kind of bonus level. The sex these 'people' do eventually have is also extremely unadventurous. It's missionary or not at all thanks.

Let me finish by saying that I'm not entirely sure that the developers of this game didn't, shall we say, really really enjoy playing it, one hand on the keyboard, late at night when the cleaners had gone. And that makes me uncomfortable.

Singles is not a relationship simulator. It models human pair-bonding and mating rituals in only the most basic and limited way. It's tedious to play, system-hungry and once you're seen them bonk and realised all you can do then is wait for the relationship to decay, you'll realise that if you really want to observe tacky, overdramatic interrelationships between people who hardly know each other, you're better off watching Big Brother Up Late.

**Anthony Fordham** 



FOR Didn't damage my PC

AGAINST

Gameplay Character models Theme song

OVERALL

A cynical - and boring - attempt to add sex to the Sims





Developer: Cryptic Studios ■ Publisher: NCSoft ■ Distributor: www.gamesuniverse.com.au ■ Price: \$95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: ??

### SYSTEM

### NEED

PIII 800Mhz 256MB RAM 2GB HDD space GeForce 2 or ATI Radeon 8500+ 56k modem

### WANT

PIV 1.7GHZ 512MB RAM GeForce FX 5600 or ATI Radeon 9600+ Broadband

### MULTIPLAYER

Er, yes

### ONLINE

Yes, the official site has a huge amount of info, including the full game manual online. Read up, and get excited.

uperheroes and massively multiplayer online games are a perfect match - probably even more so than the party-based adventuring of your typical fantasy romp. If you've ever been into comics, then you'd easily understand why. You see, beating thugs to a pulp is only a very small part of the day-to-day soap opera that is the life of a comic book superhero. There's also the struggle of maintaining personal relationships, the annoyance of having to put up with other hot-headed heroes, and the torturous self-

Come fly with me, come fly, come fly awaaay.

floored halls waiting to fill you in on the latest super crimes. There's always something happening around every corner. Whilst heroes tend to congregate in one central area in each hub to find training, meet up with other heroes for some teamplay, make contacts with various NPCs, or just goof about with their newfound super-friends, the city areas and neighbouring suburbs are so big that you'll always be able to slink off on your own if you feel like it. City of Heroes very successfully supports the

# you can create your own more permanent supergroup (and even give your team a catchy name)

doubt over their own super-abilities. Now what better place to bring that to life than in an online world where real-life personalities and virtual powers can clash in an orgy of superhero role-playing?

The virtual world of Paragon City is a vast place - perfect for hordes of heroes to hang out in. Aside from the hustle bustle of the human players, gangs of Alcontrolled criminals crawl the alleyways harassing innocent pedestrians, traffic weaves between looming skyscrapers, and NPCs stand about in shiny marble-

loner or the social butterfly, and you can even get a thrill simply from sitting atop a building and watching other higherlevel heroes go about their duties.

Do you remember that cool scene in Sam Raimi's Spider-Man where Peter Parker sits in his bedroom designing his Spider-Man costume for the very first time? Well, in City of Heroes, you get to live out that thrill - and in doing so, your real life becomes, in effect, your secret identity. If you take a look at online fantasy games such as Everquest, there's

not a lot of room for expressing your own sense of style or individual flair by choosing to be yet another elven archer or dwarven fighter. You end up tirelessly expressing yourself through text-based communication - typing as fast as you can - so that other players get some sense of your personality. In a world of superheroes, however, your costume alone can speak volumes for the kind of person you are, or want to be. Just as Peter Parker struggled to come up with a look that truly represented his agile new self, character creation in City of Heroes is one of the most enjoyable - and yet tricky - things you'll get to do in the game. How do you want people to perceive you? What kind of hero do you want to be? Because of the huge array of options, it can be hard to make up your mind. Thankfully, the game allows you to store up to eight different characters, so there's plenty of room for experimentation.

First, you must choose an Origin - Mutant, Science, Technology, Magic or Natural. As you might have guessed, this not only sets you on the path to creating yourself a cool backstory, but it determines the skill sets that you'll have access to. You then choose from a variety of classes called Archetypes. There's the long-range Blaster, the Controller who



hero - in City of Heroes you're only limited by your own imagination. When you finally get past the tutorial and enter Paragon City for the first time, you'll marvel (no pun intended) at the creative array of heroes leaping, flying or just hanging around town. From the big black brawler with the white beard named "White Chocolate", to the sexy tiger woman bespectacled skinny man in pink tights or a cloaked figure shrouded behind a hazy dark energy shield, almost no one in City of Heroes looks even remotely similar. It's amazing that the majority of players have chosen to create their own unique heroes, rather than imitate famous characters. I guess I shouldn't have made an Iron Fist clone, then.

customisation. One scrapper might choose martial arts, and another might choose to fight with a melee weapon - as a result they'll have very different fighting styles and access to different abilities in combat. Likewise, one Blaster might eventually choose flight, whilst another might choose speed so they can cross town like the Flash. Characters that chose the same starting powers at level one will eventually diverge until they are distinctly different heroes.

Combat utilises a queued action system in order to make sense of the variety of powers that can be performed. You click on an opponent to target them (you assess their threat level by the colour of their name) and then press a hot-key to perform a superpower, be it a simple punch to the head, a beam of fire from your fists, a gust of wind to knock the opponent down, a bolt of energy, a swing from your weapon, an immobilising ice ray... and so on. You can queue up your next move, and only perform actions again once they've regenerated (through customisation, you can speed up the recharge rate of powers, make them dish out more damage, or improve accuracy and so forth). Whilst the combat has its annoyances (for instance, melee characters are always







around), it's a lot of fun being part of epic

superhero battles that play out faithfully

There are also lots of other smaller

to the spectacle of comic book action.

touches that make this game such a charming online experience. For example,

all superheroes have exaggerated

physical skills, allowing any level 1

character to immediately start jumping

over large obstacles in style; high level

heroes can mentor low level players with

the Sidekick system; cute speech bubbles

float over civilians' heads as they cry out

for help or praise you on your costume; a

your muscles or perform other humorous

whole array of emotes allow you to flex

animations; and best of all, when you

finally hit level 10, you can create your

own more permanent supergroup (and

whole lot of fun to be had along the way.

If you spend enough time in Paragon City,

are show-offs, loners, team players, tight-

knit groups of friends and bitter rivals...

There's a lot to do, a lot to learn, and a

even give your team a catchy name).

and you'll discover its players can be

petulant, arrogant, amusing, or stunningly generous and helpful. There

It's just like in the comics.

City of Heroes has nailed it.

#### RATING



#### FOR

Very stable, remarkably bug free, looks fantastic, huge potential.

#### **AGAINST**

Combat can start to feel renetitive after some time, lots of travel on foot in the early levels before superpowers such as flight.

#### OVERALL

A very convincing debut. The future is so bright, it's probably radioactive



manipulates minds, the Defender whose primary job is to heal, the Scrapper who's the hand-to-hand specialist, and finally the big and strong but somewhat slow Tanker. You then select a primary and secondary power set for that Archetype which will determine the ability tree that you'll have access to for the rest of the game. Upon leveling up, you'll be torn between a number of different powers, which results in no two heroes of the same Origin and Archetype combination turning out the same way.

Individual powers can also be enhanced, allowing for even more

**Eliot Fish** 



Developer: KD Lab ■ Publisher: Codemasters ■ Distributor: Atari ■ Price: \$79.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

#### SYSTEM

#### NEED

P3-900 128MB RAM 32MB video card 500MB HDD

#### WANT

P3-1GHz+ 256MB RAM GeForce4 750MB HDD

#### MULTIPLAYER

102

#### ONLINE

You dig the funky visuals in Perimeter? Head to the home of the Sceners, for even wackier, non-interactive stuff. Wild!

#### RATING



OVERALL

Not to everyone's taste, but still tasty

**87** 

eviews are subjective. Remember that. Perimeter is a game that brings this into sharp relief. This a game you will either dig or not dig. It's not a question of being able to understand it, it's a question of loving (or hating) the concept.

I love the concept. I think it's cool and I'll forgive the game many idiosyncrasies because of it. You are the Legate, in command of a giant construct called a Frame. You are entrusted with the care of your people as you travel down a chain of worlds in search of the mythical "Earth." The spirits guide you. The scum supports you. The scourge wants to devour you. And the Legates of other Frames have gone mad or have their own agendas to pursue. The entire universe is hostile.

#### Riiiight...

Perimeter is an RTS that somewhat breaks the common model to varying degrees of success. The game uses a bespoke voxel terrain engine which immediately sets it apart from its contemporaries. Each map is a lovingly crafted work of surrealist art-strange whorls and spirals and great stone faces are mixed in with ziggarauts and dragons. It's an unfamiliar universe, right down to the plants. If you need

something recognisable in order to be able to get into a game, Perimeter won't work for you.

The terrain is deformable and for what seems like the first time, the deformation is a key part of the gameplay. Like all RTS, you must establish a base and maintain a line of supply in order to be able to build offensive units. The only resource is energy, supplied by energy towers, which must be built on perfectly flat ground.

So it goes, extending your base by linking energy towers, building squads and morphing them into different kinds of combat unit as the situation demands. There are complex rules for how energy is managed, and the eponymous Perimeter is a shield that protects your base but chews energy extremely quickly.

#### Okaaaaaay...

Perimeter is a brave attempt to create, as the developer claims, "real time strategy reborn" and the game is much more accessible than their previous (also excellent) title Vangers. But the central problem remains - everything is so alien, some folks just won't be able to get into it. Units work completely differently from traditional RTS, and you will be trounced



#### GALAXIES, SCHMAALAXIES

Perimeter's concept is so way out there that KD Lab's own distributor, Atari, doesn't even probably understand the game's setting. Read the back of the box and you'll be told the Frames are travelling through "a newly discovered galaxy". No dear, they ain't. They are travelling along the Chain of Worlds, which as anyone who read the background for Vangers knows, actually exists inside Hyperspace. Perimeter is strange, wild high-concept SF and it's disappointing to see it cheapened on the back of a glossy box by a few marketing hacks.

more than once by your opponent as you come to grips with all the subtleties.

For me, this is a good thing. I enjoy having to learn to play a game, and figuring out the nuances of the control method and the gameplay philosophy as I go along. But I can very easily see that this will not appeal to many players.

New ideas aside, the game quickly descends into a rock-paper-scissors combat model, but the ability to morph units on the fly makes it more unpredictable than other RTS. There are units that actually attack the ground itself, as well as units that summon swarms of scourge, and figuring out which is the best to use in any given situation is not always intuitive.

However, Perimeter's design remains solid and consistent throughout the game. The music is excellent, the graphics are refreshingly different, and the gameplay is something you'll either love or hate. I love it. You might not.

**Anthony Fordham** 



Developer: LuxoFlux ■ Publisher: Activision ■ Distributor: Activision ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Price: ??? ■ Available: Now

rue Crime has been in the public eye since E3 2002 and has always been somewhat inaccurately billed as Grand Theft Auto III meets Max Payne. True Crime has indeed used GTAIII as a very big influence, but the Max Payne aspect hasn't amounted to much other than the fact that there is a rudimentary version of bullet time in the game.

This isn't just a GTAIII clone however and one of the key differences between Rockstar's game and True Crime is the political correctness factor. In True Crime you play as police officer Nick Kang, shutting down the sort of mayhem you loved to create in GTAIII. You can still do anything you want while cruising the streets but any uncharitable acts will give you negative 'good cop/bad cop' points and turn you toward the dark side which eventually changes the game ending for you.

The setup is more like an interactive movie with a more linear structure than the GTAIII games. There are four distinct aspects to single player gameplay: cruising around LA, the action/hand to hand set pieces, stealth missions and

#### **SLOPPY DIRECTION**

True Crime: Streets of LA tries to be a bit of an interactive movie as well as a game (don't they all these days) and the developers have put together a good cast with Christopher Walken playing George the faithful desk sergeant, and Gary Oldman, Michael Madsen and Ron Perlman also involved. However they must have gone on holiday when it came to record. The voice acting is often lazy and poorly executed. Walken sounds like he was handed the script when he arrived, read it through once and left for Acapulco. A more committed unknown would have provided a better result.

bonus levels for completing objectives during missions.

During the cruising phases you can sidetrack from your mission and solve as many random crimes as you like, and have a good look at the 250 square miles of road map accurate LA. Unlike GTAIII however there are no hidden missions when you grab certain cars or items, no choice of radio stations and not as many types of vehicles to nab. It is also in this phase that the graphical limitations of the game are most obvious. As you can see from some of the screenshots the textures and filtering are quite primitive. Cruising is the most fun part of the game though and the driving physics and cityscape give you some scope for mayhem (just don't hit the pedestrians!)

The action set pieces use a more detailed rendering engine as they take place in confined areas. You are also able to see things a bit more clearly with the camera more closely zoomed in.

Unfortunately the biffo aspect of the game lacks subtlety and basically involves a lot of button mashing and the occasional big move when your opponent is dazed. It was meant to offer more 'realism' than the fist fighting in GTAIII but while there are more animations the mechanics of fighting are no better.

Stealth missions require you to creep around taking out your opponents with silent stun moves. These are quite easy and eventually become almost gratutitous. If you manage to complete all the objectives in a chapter you'll open up a bonus level. During the bonus levels you are able to go to any one of three types of training area and swap your shields (accumulated by solving crimes) for martial arts, shooting or driving contests which if won give you new moves/vehicles.



There is one major aspect to True Crime that sets it apart from its console siblings, which we haven't been able to go into here and that is the multiplayer support. There are five modes of play from straight fighting to cruising the streets but as this was reviewed from an early release in order to get it into the magazine at a relevant time there were no servers, or players, around to test it out.

True Crime is not a long game, it takes much less time to finish than GTAIII/Vice City, and it allows you to progress through the story without completing missions so it can be finished very quickly. Think of it as a game made to be saleable to a broader audience than GTAIII. This is a game for those of you who played GTAIII and felt guilty every time you beat up a policeman or ran over a housewife. Remember that it is essentially a console game though and don't expect technical excellence.

**George Soropos** 



#### SYSTEM

#### NEED

Win98/Me/XP PIII 800MHz 128Mb RAM 32Mb Video 2.9Gb HD

#### WANT

PIV 1.7GHz or equivalent 256Mb RAM 64Mb Video

#### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

#### ONLINE

www.activision.com/ microsite/truecrime/

#### RATING



#### OVERALL

Essentially a more politically correct version of GTA3/Vice City. True Crime has less depth and is much easier to play through but lacks the sense of humour and the chaotic 'fun factor' of Rockstar's classic titles.

70



Developer: Reality Pump ■ Publisher: Auran ■ Distributor: Red Ant ■ Price: \$29.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

#### SYSTEM

NEED 450 MHz CPU 128 MB RAM 16 MB videocard

#### WANT

1.5 GHz CPU **256 MB RAM** 32 MB videocard

#### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

#### ONLINE

For all your chivalrous needs.

#### RATING



Questin' has been both more exciting and more amusing.

kay, to start off with, there's this "once upon a time". As in, "once upon a time, there was a handsome prince". And there was, too. And he was brave and strong and just and he spaketh with lots of thees and thous and ran around slayething things.

But dark and treacherous powers seized the prince, and sealed him away in another dimension while they ran rampant in his fair kingdom. Until a good magician brought him back ....

Welcome to KnightShift, the game that makes a half-hearted mockery of Medjeeval adventure in the form of halfbaked RPG and RTS. Yes, it does offer a combined package with the two genres. No, it does not do anything particularly innovative with either one. In spite of this, it does offer a few hours of lighthearted fun, even for the more discerning gamer.

If the story sounds like a bit of a cliché, that's because it is. Intentionally. It's all part of the tongue-in-cheek charm (for lack of a better word). As Prince John, you'll have to destroy the evil wizard, rescuing your betrothed from a dragon and restoring the kingdom's treasures along the way. Nobody ever said that a cliché couldn't make for a decent adventure game, right? I mean, hey - it's a cliché because it works. What I found irritating was the game's not-so-unspoken





assumption that the player is a guy, and the appallingly written manual. Minor flaws, granted, but enough to subtly mar my enjoyment of the actual game.

The user interface, on the other hand, is smooth, and a positive pleasure to navigate. You have everything you need cleanly laid out on your dashboard, minimising the necessity for extensive tutorials, and allowing you to jump straight into playing.

The RPG element comes into play in the years when Prince John is incarcerated. You take the role of one of eight playable characters, including an archer, a knight, an Amazon mage and a priestess. It's little more than the bare bones version of role-playing, with none of the extras we've come to expect of the genre. The only way you can customise your appearance is by changing the colour of your clothes, and the upgradeable character attributes are limited to health, defense and magic. The gameplay itself is fairly respectable, but there are only so many wolves and bears you can fight before wishing for a few ogres or an undead army. Also, your character will fight its own battles, requiring you to do little more than sit back with your mouse over your cache of blue healing mushrooms. As far as

#### **MEDIEVAL ON YO' ASS.**

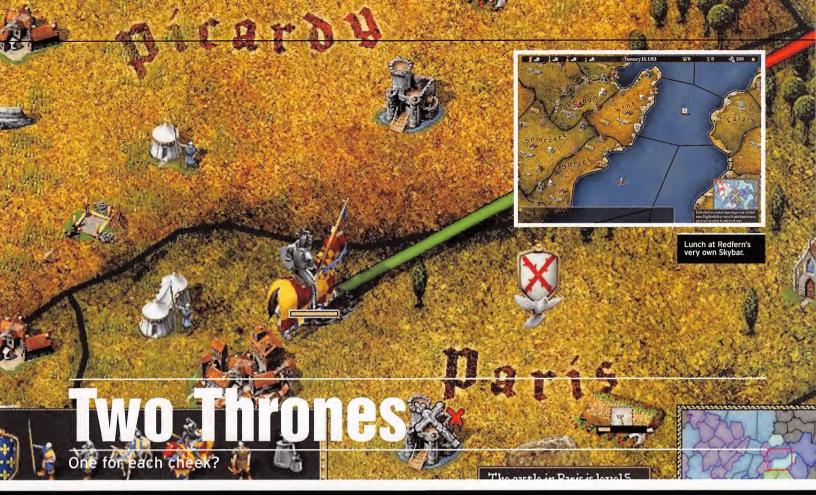
One of the best things about KnightShift is you can go straight to the mode you want without having to slog through bits of game you don't want to play. So if you only want to play the RPG, well, that's all you play, and vice versa. Additionally, the game features a Skirmish mode, which is pretty much what it sounds like - 14 maps, and all melee all the way, baby. Or, you can round up seven of your mates for some online, Gauntlet-style adventurin'. Don't say I didn't warn ye.

storytelling goes, it is your mission to ultimately find the wizard who will release the prince from his exile, but there are a number of side missions to play through as well, to collect rare items and for leveling up fun.

The RTS component you play as Prince John. It is, however, not quite like any RTS you'll have ever played before, with the economy based on milk, requiring you to house and herd cows, and your units including mothers-in-law, flying witches and the inevitable knights, each with their own unique abilities to bring to the table. Initially, it plays more like RPG than RTS, though, and it would probably be safe to say that it's more a blend of the two than specifically and only RTS. You'll have to build your resources and armies, but it's fairly lightweight, and your troops will do pretty much as they please, no matter how you order them.

You'll get over the sound bytes pretty quickly, and the obstreperousness of your characters will frustrate you, but in the end, this is a pretty tidy adventure, and you never know - you might just find yourself having a bit of enjoyethment. Verily,

Michelle Starr



Developer: Paradox ■ Publisher: Auran ■ Distributor: Red Ant ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Price: \$69.95 ■ Available: Now

istorical war-gaming has traditionally been seen as the realm of extremely anal history buffs with a disconcerting love of cardigans and comfortable yet thoroughly unattractive cordurov slacks. The countless statistics tables, graphs and other numerical doodads are enough to make even the most hardened tabletop RPG player out there blush and look for an excuse to leave the room, Paradox Entertainment is obviously aware that the sheer complexity of most modern war-games has a tendency to put off most punters and in acknowledgement of that fact have released Two Thrones, an attempt to simplify a rather daunting gaming genre.

As the title suggests Two Thrones is set in Medieval Europe between the years 1337 and 1490. If you are not particularly au fait with your French/British history (and let's face it, who is?), these years were witness to two of the most brutal and drawn out wars in history, 'The 100 Years War' and 'The War of the Roses'.

#### **A SPOT OF HISTORY**

The main conflict covered in Two Thrones is the Hundred Years War. The war came about through constant antagonism between the French and English kings. Lasting over one hundred years this fascinating conflict had destroyed much of France and its provinces. By the end farmlands were decimated, civil fighting was rife, marauders roamed the countryside and much of the populace fell victim to famine, pestilence and the Black Death. The interesting twist to all this is the French King Louis XI actually benefited from this as the destruction of most of the nobility enabled him to unite France stronger than ever before.





Two Thrones takes you back to those times and gives you control of one of the major players in this drawn out conflict. The gamer is presented with a map broken up into a variety of regions that effectively become the squares of a chessboard. As is normal in games of this type, each region is home to a number of structures that are responsible for the economy of the game and unit production.

As stated at the outset, Two Thrones is ultimately an attempt to simplify a rather complex game style and in a lot of respects this feat has been achieved but it has come at a cost. Controlling the game couldn't be simpler; you click on a unit and move it to another region or send it off to war; alternatively you can click on a building and choose an action such as forcing it to build more units or engage in some other effort for the benefit or

detriment of your nation's economical and military status. Occasionally options for diplomacy will present themselves and you just click on your preferred course of action. On paper this sounds like an effective solution but ultimately falls apart because there is just too much stuff to do. The game plays out in real time so there is no chance to sit back and consider your options and in line with this theme of simplification all management aides such as graphs and tables have been removed meaning that unless you have a Kevin Trudeau-esque memory you have no way of seeing the big picture resultant from all your decisions. This causes the game to degrade in to a mess of guesswork and random clicking in the hope of achieving some favorable result.

No doubt if this area of history is incredibly exciting to you then you may squeeze some enjoyment from this title but for the rest of us it is little more than an exercise in frustration. Ironically simplification is not a simple task in itself and the developer's attempts in this regard have produced little more than confusing mess.

#### **Nathan Cocks**



#### SYSTEM

PIII 450
128 MB RAM
600 MB HDD
4MB DirectX
compatible vid card
DirectX compatible
sound card

#### WANT

PIV 1.7GHz or equivalent 256Mb RAM 64Mb Video

#### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

#### ONLINE

Play the 100 Years War online. Maybe it's even a better game...

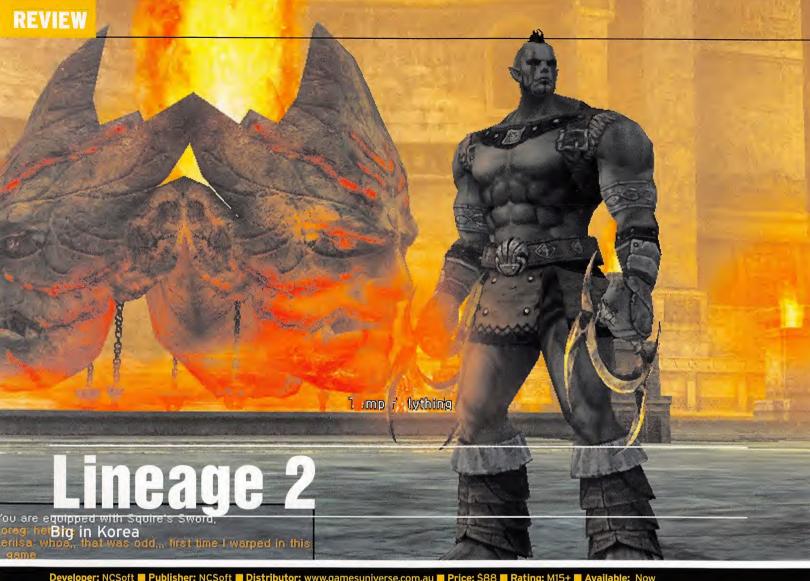
#### RATING



#### OVERALL

One for die hard French history nuts





Developer: NCSoft ■ Publisher: NCSoft ■ Distributor: www.gamesuniverse.com.au ■ Price: \$88 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

aoul Kim and Hyeong-Jin Kim are probably not familiar names to most gamers in this country but get them into any LAN gaming venue in Korea and you'd need several water cannon, a vat of warm butter and a few battalions of those pyjama wearing blokes with the Kendo sticks to get them out again. They created the hugely successful Lineage MMORPG, which held the record for having the highest number of players for many years, and invented the vast mythology that sustains the game and provided the inspiration for this sequel.

#### Making an Impression

First impressions are very important in a genre where many games offer a free downloadable 7 day trial. Losing players

mainly for the snazzy special effects screenshots, but also because we're impatient and wizard types sometimes have teleport spells.

Once we got over the post-post-postfeminist chic of our chosen character (she's the sexy one in the bondage bikini) and her penchant for sticking her perfectly formed butt in our face every time she moved anywhere, we had to figure out what to do. There is a very simple in-game tutorial available from the main NPC in your start area when you create a new character. This seemed easy, until the NPC gave me his second and final command to go to the 'Elven Village' for further instruction. I later discovered that this should have been the 'Dark Elven Village' Unfortunately I also wasted

#### SYSTEM

#### NEED

800MHz, 256Mb RAM, GeForce2 or better afx

#### WANT

PIV 2.5GHz or Equivalent, 512Mb RAM, GeForce4 Ti or better

#### MULTIPLAYER

**Exclusively** 

#### ONLINE

Forums: http://boards.lineage 2.com/

#### Instead of focusing on power levelling, players can think about their clan affiliations and reputation

interest quickly can bring disaster, rack and ruin to a developer, not to mention bad publicity as in the case of Star Wars

Without wanting to state too much of the obvious, there are five races to choose from when setting up your character and initially only two choices of profession (you can get all the detailed info here: http://www.lineage2.com/Knowledge/rac e human.asp) We decided to start things off with a Dark Elf Mystic, we liked the idea of having a magic using character,

half a day first trying to find my way to the Elven Village before realising that this was just a bug and that it was actually impossible for me at my level to get to the Elven Village. We tested a few other character races (all of which have their own unique starting areas) and found that this problem was fortunately limited to the Dark Elves only.

Money or Adena as it is called is a very important part of the game, perhaps too important, as almost everything you do will cost something. When we first

#### PVP

Lineage 2 has an 'open' PvP system which means that anyone can attack anyone at any time. Sound like chaos? If we decide to attack other players our name gets lit up in purple and if we do it excessively our name will turn red. Red means that we will be attacked on sight by guards and cannot shop. However if we decide that eeevil is not for us we can get back our neutral status by killing some critters of a higher level. In practice the system seemed to work well and the number of backstabbers and PvP maniacs was manageable.

ventured into a weapon/armour shop the prices were mind boggling, there is a big gap between the cheap low level gear (around 40-100 adena) and the next level up (1500-2500 adena) which creates a bit of a hurdle early on to developing your character and getting away from the total 'noob' look.

#### The Demographics

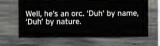
Unlike single player games the quality and quantity of people in an MMORPG is just as important as its design and features so we're going to borrow a marketing term here to help us describe the general community within Lineage 2. Our first impressions of the community were not good, but there was a rather amusing reason for that.

Dark Elves are pretty much the 'evil'

















#### **COMING SOON**

One of the difficulties in reviewing new MMORPGs is that they often have big chunks of content missing when they first launch and Lineage 2 is no exception. The biggest reasons for experienced players to try Lineage 2 are probably the promised Siege Warfare action and the Dragon Taming ability which are both slated to come in with the game's first expansion in June. By the time you read this it may already be live. Hopefully we will get some space to discuss these features at a later date.



race within the game due to the kinds of powers and class types at their disposal as they develop. As such it is not a good choice for a new player because the kinds of people playing them are usually trying to be 'evil' which in their minds seemed to mean not being very talkative, helpful or mature. Baiting these players was quite fun to be honest, but not a good way to learn the ropes of the game. Player versus player combat can be initiated any time anywhere in Lineage 2 (see PVP boxout).

Thankfully this social leprosy was not indicative of the whole game and when we restarted as an Orc and then again as a Human we found those communities to be much livelier, friendlier and more helpful to the new player. Which is just as well considering that the in-game help system is not actually in-game yet, and that the GMs seem to think that anyone asking them a question is trying to cheat the game in some inexplicable way and should therefore be ignored or insulted. A dedicated 'help' chat channel would not go astray here.

We should also mention that there is a bit of friction already between some US and Korean players as the Yanks seem to think that the 'Asians' are clogging up the US servers and the Koreans feel that Lineage is 'their' game and that they shouldn't be dictated to by the Americans. It will be interesting to see how this develops when the full strategic elements of the game are brought in (see Coming Soon boxout)

Lineage 2 seems quite limited when you first set up your character. However as you gain levels you also gain abilities at a fixed rate and new career paths open up which specialise your avatar's skills. Our Orc Fighter, the mighty 'duh', shot up levels quite quickly due to his ability to take on tougher opponents straight away. The Orc zone has hostile critters of a higher level than the other zones due to the Orc's more developed fighting abilities.

Our Mystics took longer to level up but their attack spell killed their lower level opponents in one shot (yes there is one attack spell, after a while you can get two!) and combined with their healing spell made Lineage 2 magic users tougher than those in other games at this level.

Apart from the two or three career branching choices you can make for your avatar there really isn't a lot of player interaction with the level raising process, which is good. Instead of focusing on power leveling, players can think about their clan affiliations, reputation and their place in the ranks of their nation's forces. Thinking about such things puts the players mind on other players and social interactions rather than repetitive endless monster bashing.

#### **Technical Stuff**

Running about Lineage 2 is a very rewarding experience from an aesthetic point of view and the game encourages exploration by having many hidden scenic locations. The game was built using a modified version of the Unreal engine which fully supports DX8.1 and features very detailed textures which make the landscape and the local fauna look rather spiffy. One drawback is a relatively limited sight range and the required use of 'fog' to lighten the graphical load. Far

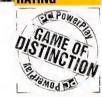
Cry this isn't. But that's OK.

The one really annoying thing we discovered about Lineage 2 is its movement interface. We click and we click on the ground, and over long distances we click a lot. Apparently Richard Garriot's new game for NCSoft (Tabula Rasa) makes a bold attempt to solve this cursed MMORPG problem, Lineage 2 hasn't. Some people don't like a keyboard movement interface but at least with one of those you can have a 'keep running' key and not have to manually initiate every step. We should also mention that the average ping time to the fastest of their servers is usually just around 195.

#### Why Play?

Creating a new MMORPG is a very big job, and not too dissimilar to creating a new designer drug. Essentially you are trying to grab people's attention from other games by offering them something they can't do anywhere else in an environment that has none of the shortcomings of the game they are currently playing. By the time you read this Lineage 2's first expansion should be live, adding siege warfare, dragon taming and other interesting features. There is no downloadable trial unfortunately so you do have to take the plunge and buy the box. If you have gotten bored with Dark Age of Camelot and Asheron's Call you might find features here that you will love. Lineage 2 seems to have more potential than Horizons and could be just the thing until World of Warcraft, Dragon Empires or Middle Earth Online pop out of the woodwork.

**George Soropos** 



#### FOR

Large and detailed game world, Attractive 3D engine, Strategic gameplay, Good management of social groups

#### **AGAINST**

Can be difficult to get started, self important GMs, Money too important in character development, Needs more content

#### **OVERALL**

Siege combat has already been seen in DAOC and Dragons promised in Dragon Empires however Lineage 2 has the newest and most available implementations of these things and is also a solid game to boot.





Developer: EA Sports ■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$?9.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

#### **SYSTEM**

#### NEED

700Mhz or faster 128MB RAM 256MB RAM for XP/2000 32MB video card

#### WANT

1.5Gbz or faster 512MB RAM 64MB video card

#### MULTIPLAYER

ONLINE

Your best daily football news, fixtures and results

#### RATING



#### OVERALL

An improvement, but still not a contender for the title

#### uro 2004 is probably the next best thing to the World Cup, with 51 European nations battling it out for glory out on the green. No surprise then that it should warrant a mid-year "re-packaging" of FIFA 04 to cater to all the football mad gamers who know they can pick a better squad than Sven-Goran "l'll play Heskey 'til the day I die" Eriksson. But before you dismiss Euro 2004 as a cynical piece of marketing, you should know that there are definite improvements here over last year's FIFA that make this a better overall game of football.

We won't beat around the bush. UEFA Euro 2004 is still a shallow football game in comparison to its arch rival, Pro Evolution Soccer, but it's still a fun bit of football gaming for those of you who don't want to have to put in the effort to learn the depths to Pro Evo's controls. Ironically, Euro 2004 actually expands upon the FIFA 04 controls with new moves stolen directly from the Pro Evo manual. Holding the left trigger (if you're playing with a PC gamepad - and please tell us that you are) and pressing the through ball button will now execute a chipped through ball. Likewise, this "modifier" button will allow you to put in an early cross. You can now also do a shot-

#### **SMOOTH AND BUMPY LIKE COLLINA'S HEAD**

The overall presentation is, as you would expect from EA Sports, extremely smooth and easy on the eyes. The in-game commentary is also very well integrated. There are, however, basic features that are still missing from the in-game menus and options screens. All the tactical options are frustratingly lightweight and you can't customise formations or even view the morale or fatigue of players when making substitutions! You'll also need a dual-analogue gamepad with four shoulder buttons if you want to utilise the default control set-up. Euro 2004 is not exactly a user-friendly PC game when it comes to configuration. In that respect, this game is better on console.

fake to fool the keeper, It's amazing really that these moves weren't in FIFA 04 in the first place. They definitely make for a more enjoyable Euro 2004 experience clearly, the more options you have at your fingertips whilst playing, the more realistically the game is going to play.

#### **Pump it long**

Of course, Euro 2004 doesn't quite go far enough. You can't short pass out from corners (a bizarre omission) and free kicks feel like they're more in the will of the gods than anything. With the "golf game" kick-ometer, you can still net the ball even if you mistime your button presses! Defending corners also feels frustratingly arbitrary you can never really tell who's going to win the ball and it becomes a button mash. It seems that the FIFA game engine is now torn between being an arcade game for casual players and a simulation to satisfy real football fans. The result is an inconsistent gameplay experience.

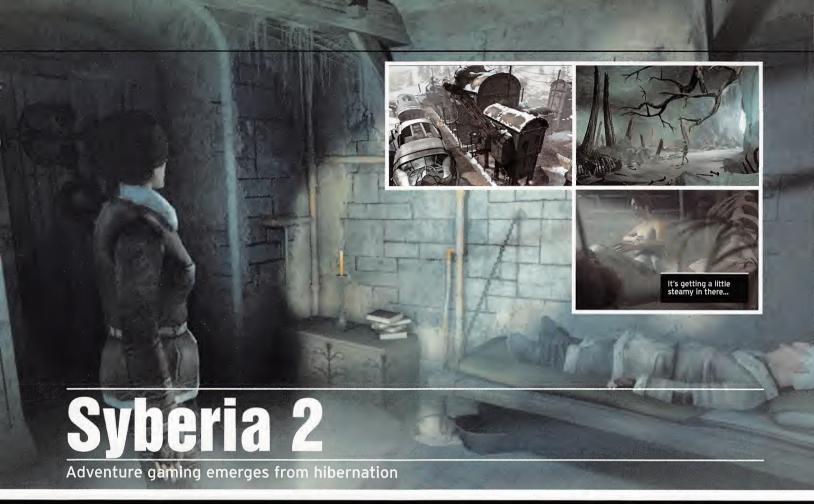
Other improvements over FIFA 04, however, include the general AI of your teammates and the players on the opposing team. Instead of the brain dead footballers in FIFA 04, your team mates will now make intelligent runs off the ball and move into space, allowing you to work the ball around and create chances. There's certainly no faulting Euro 2004's animation - you can actually see players waving their arms when they want the ball amongst other subtle realisms.

**Eliot Fish** 









Developer: Microids ■ Publisher: Microids ■ Distributor: www.gamesuniverse.com.au ■ Price: \$80 ■ Rating: N/A ■ Available: Now

he first Syberia tells the tale of a driven lawyer trying to nail a toy factory who gets swept into the oddball world of an eccentric, old, genius along the way. Through flashbacks you get to see the creation of the eccentric Hans Voralberg and through learning his past you start to understand his hopes and desires. In short, you get great characters and an internal journey that matches all of the charging around on the outside.

Syberia 2 reopens the curtains right after the first game and contains another carefully crafted world of fantasy filled with clockwork masterpieces, mystical shaman, beautiful ice flows, blue grass and dreams of mammoths. The lovely graphics and sound bring all of this to life; unfortunately it's a life that lacks some of the warmth of the first title.

The characters that you know and love have taken a backseat to the desire to see hairy pachyderms. Hans drives the story

#### **BENOIT SOKAL**

The Syberia series was written by a fellow named Benoît Sokal, who's a major mover and shaker on the European comic strip scene. His Inspector Canardo character is a down trodden and disillusioned duck detective. He's one of those tragic everyman characters and he brought a fallible dignity to animal characters dressed in human clothes. Sokal was a pioneer of colouring his strips on computer and soon fell into love with the idea of games, so much so took to the idea of conceiving, pitching and supervising games to tell his stories. First there was L'Amerzone then Syberia and now Syberia II. Welcome to the imagination of one guy with interesting daydreams...



on with a burning desire that just isn't explored in this game – at all – and Kate does whatever it takes to get him there, without any human response beyond a can-do attitude.

That leaves the journey itself as the central star which is a good and a bad thing. The world itself is beautifully heart-felt. It feels like a real place that the writer Benoît Sokal likes to visit in his daydreams. The problem comes in the way you're teased with distracting side quests that seem to lead away from Syberia instead of towards it, only to have some lucky accident shoot you onward almost as if apologising for the delay.

#### Mouse sweep

On the plus side, the mini-quests and puzzles that form these distractions win big points for the way that they integrate into the world and what you're doing.

You still have to pick up everything you find and make note of everything that you can examine to make sure you've used it, but most of the time you know just what you are looking or have some idea what would logically help you out.

I must admit I got stuck a few times, but most of them were because I missed a couple-of-centimetre-square hotspot hiding against the background.

The general rule for this game is, if





you are stuck, go back and run your mouse slowly over every part of the screens you can get to because, chances are, you've missed something.

Once you have the hang of the puzzles you're in for a trip to another world. It's pretty, sounds great, features some neat cinematics, and has cute little bunnies scurrying past the foreground that gives the game a magic-garden quality.

As you play along the game builds a real desire to see what's around the next corner as well as making you wonder how far this ride will take you down the rabbit hole. Unfortunately, without the warmth of exploring the central characters you miss a touch of the moment-to-moment wonder that made the first game so great. As a sequel it gives great closure, but, if you are looking for a stand-alone adventure, you should probably look to the first Syberia instead.

Timothy C. Best

#### SYSTEM

NEED
P350
64Mb RAM
16Mb Videocard
400Mb HDD space

WANT P800

P800 128Mb RAM

MULTIPLAYER

10

ONLINE

www.trans-siberia.com/ Welcome to the trans-Siberian railway. There might not be Mammoths at the end of the line, but there's surely a lot of ice and snow.

#### RATING



OVERALL

It's like an ice sculpture: it's pretty, it's interesting, but it's just a little cold



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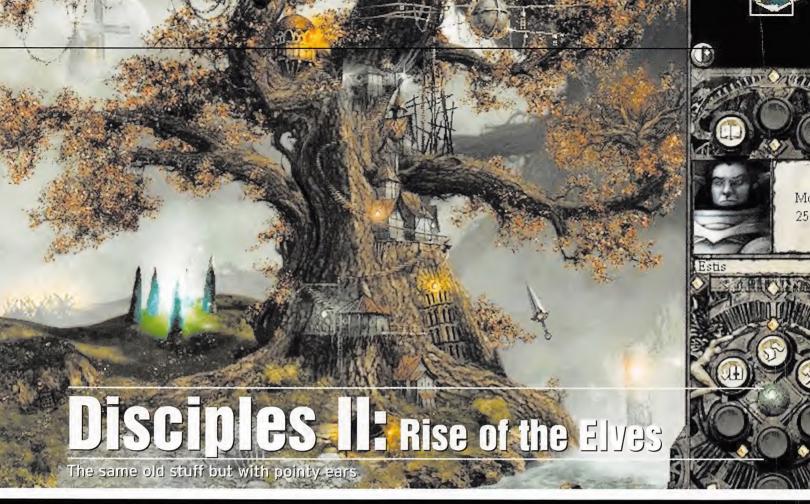






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Developer: Strategy First Inc ■ Publisher: Strategy First Inc ■ Distributor: Red Ant ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Price: \$29.95 ■ Available: Now

t's been a couple of years now since Disciples II: Dark Prophecy, but in that time we've already seen two expansions - Guardians of the Light and Servants of the Dark. This makes Rise of the Elves the third stand-alone expansion pack to be spawned from what is, to be honest, a rapidly aging strategy game. The big difference with Rise of the Elves is that it's the first of these expansions to introduce a whole new playable race yes, the Elves! All-new units may sound tempting to those of you who are exhausted with the Empire, Dwarves, Legions of the Damned and Undead, but the reality is that this expansion probably only holds value for those who are still yet to play Disciples II (the full version of which is included in this install).

The integration of the new Elven race means over 30 all-new units (that's including unit upgrades) and magic spells - and fancy new artwork to go with it - but it also means learning the advantages and disadvantages of deploying these units across the world map. The Sage, for instance, is your unit for planting rods, but they also have a leadership rating of 1 allowing another unit to accompany them, plus they have the ability to summon Ents in combat. Then you have a huge variety of archer units, such as the Watchman,



Stinger, Warden, Sentry, Brigand,
Marauder, Hunter and Scout - allowing
for deadly attacks from the back row with
magic-imbued, poisoned or double-shot
arrows. These units are definitely a
refreshing addition to the game, but when
it comes down to it, the general tasks you
need to carry out each turn are largely
unchanged from any of the previous
Disciples installments.

You still need to send units out to transform the landscape, commandeer resources and scout for enemy strongholds. You still enlist thieves (only this time they have pointy ears) to poison enemy units on the map or infiltrate their ranks. You still build and expand your fortresses in the same way, allowing you daily access to new spells and units, and you still cast god-like spells on the main map and trade items at neutral shops for a bit more pocketmoney or a crucial resurrection potion or two. The 2D map and combat artwork - whilst beautifulare also starting to feel a little dated.

Newcomers should probably be warned that the gameplay remains excruciatingly difficult, even very early on in the campaign. Though turn-based, you'll need to save after every successful turn in case everything goes pear-shaped in your next round. This is because the





extremely story-driven missions have scripted trigger points when your units reach various spots on the world map, so you can suddenly find yourself facing an ambush or a sudden change in objective and have your game screwed. Sometimes you'll replay a whole mission from the beginning again because you actually need to plan and work towards having a certain amount of power before you trigger points in the story.

The strategy in Disciples II requires such careful planning (sometimes to the point where you can't afford to lose a single movement point or squander a single gold coin) that it's sure to frustrate even the shrewdest tactician, but all the same it's satisfying when you nail it. Rise of the Elves puts a new spin on things, but this is still the same old Disciples II.

**Eliot Fish** 



#### SYSTEM

#### NEED

PII 233Mhz 32MB RAM 8MB video card

#### WANT

PII 300Mhz+ 64MB RAM 16MB video card

#### MULTIPLAYER

#### ONLINE

uunu elfenmie eor

We're still waiting for Something Awful to pick this as Awful Link of the Day.

#### RATING



#### **OVERALL**

It's still a great strategy game, if you have the patience, but surely it's time for something really new.

**75** 



Developer: Brat ■ Publisher: CDV ■ Distributor: QV Software ■ Price: \$69.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

#### SYSTEM

#### NEED

P3-600 128MB RAM 32MB T&L Videocard 1GB HDD

#### WANT

P4-2GHz+ 512MB RAM 64MB T&L Videocard 1GB HDD

#### MULTIPLAYER

res

#### ONLINE

www.eugenies.net Scary stuff. reed; at heart, is what happens when people dissect a game like Halo and try to reassemble the pieces without any due regard for why the pieces were there in the first place or how they contributed to the gameplay experience. As you play Breed you will be constantly assailed by the sensation that you've seen all this before but done on so much better.

The majority of Breed's missions put you in command of a small squad of soldiers and demand you follow set way points throughout each level, systematically destroying any alien life forms you encounter. There is some sort of hokey back story about an over powering Alien race and the enslavement of Earth but terrible voice acting and scripting ensure you wont want to spend too much time thinking about it.

You are given some control over your team but the streamlined simplicity of unit management fails due to the fact the unit AI is just not up to the task. Your squad is so inept that many times it is

actually more prudent to leave everyone behind and take on the level solo. Not a big task since the enemy AI rely more their ability to impersonate the dive roll maneuver made popular by the Covenant Elite in Halo, only difference being the Covenant knew you shouldn't roll INTO enemy fire.

There is some fun to be had in Breed, the graphics engine does provide some relatively enjoyable environments in which to blast alien scum and the use of vehicles; the tank in particular, can be a blast thanks to responsive and well thought out controls. Alas the game falls down in so many other areas that the enjoyable parts only serve to highlight the game's deficiencies.

What really hurts Breed in the end though is an overall lack of polish. The game is filled with a number of features that are just thrown in without any real understanding of what purpose they serve and end up failing as a result. Even something as simple as a lean function

#### **STARSHIP BREEDERS?**

Perhaps one of the most striking things about Breed is how much it apes the style of the film Starship Troopers. While the nuts and bolts of the game owe a lot of Halo it is patently obvious the designers certainly enjoyed the film adaptation of the R.A. Heinlein fascist classic. The opening movie plays out like a propagandist's wet dream and the horribly acted troop commander speaks in a suitably patriotic fervor. Even the Earth army's insignia bears an uncanny resemblance with the film's Mobile Infanty logo.

does nothing but rotate the screen, serving no purpose at all. Unfortunately this lack of understanding of purpose is indicative of the game overall.

Then there are the bugs, even once patched Breed is full of them. Most are mild annoyances such as inexplicable frame drops and cut outs in the audio track when things get heated. However Breed comes with its fair share of game killers such as waypoints that refuse to acknowledge you have reached them and a propensity to corrupt your game saves.

Games like Breed are disappointing predominantly because they are not total failures but are so hampered by their own inadequacies they cannot possibly be recommended in any light. If Breed is to serve any form of admirable purpose it is as a reminder; a reminder that a good game is more than the sum of its parts but rather the result of understanding how those parts inter-relate and function as a cohesive whole.

#### **Nathan Cocks**

# Breed comes with its fair share of game killers such as a propensity to corrupt your game saves

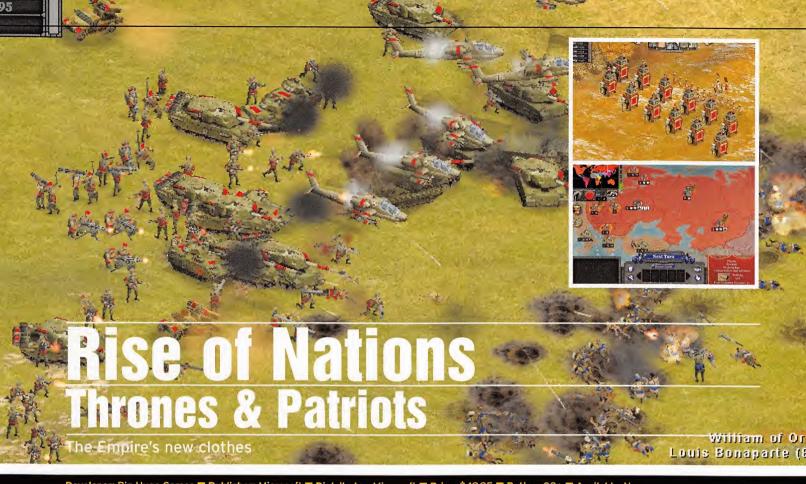


OVERALL An uninspired Halo rip-off









Developer: Big Huge Games ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

veryone likes to play god occasionally; anyone who says otherwise is either a liar, or they're trying to sell you something. And as far as indulging one's god-complex goes, there are few titles which do as superb a job as Rise of Nations, the award-winning RTS from Microsoft and Big Huge Games. What more could you want than to conquer the world?

Yes, well. It appears that some of us are greedy buggers. And in anticipation of said greed, Big Huge Games has developed – yup, you guessed it – an expansion pack.

Thrones & Patriots has a lot to live up to. Not only does Rise of Nations boast a fusion of real-time battles with a turnbased disposition, it is also one of the first strategy games to introduce a real-time model for the progression of time, as well as the ability to conquer through the sheer size of your empire based on agriculture, production and architectural feats. The new features of the expansion, though, fit quite nicely into the core game without disrupting the delicate balance at all.

The first difference you will notice – and the most obvious – is the addition of six new playable races: the Dutch, Iroquois, Lakota, Americans, the Indians and the Persians. The characteristics and bonuses of these races dovetail neatly

with those of the pre-existing races, and offer new units which may – or may not – make your life slightly more difficult, depending on whom you choose to be.

On top of choosing which race to play - which is nothing new - you are now able to choose a political alignment from six different government models; again, each of these comes with specific advantages, meaning you'll have to plan ahead more carefully. This concept features quite heavily in the gameplay, and can turn the tide of a campaign midway. However, the fact that you have to reselect your alignment at the start of every battle (no, not every campaign, as would make more sense) makes this feature seem like more of an add-on rather than a fully integrated part of the game. Also, with each type of government, you receive a different type of general, who leads your troops into battle, and renders a different type of assistance, whether it be healing or increased fire power.

But at the heart and soul of the expansion are the four new single-player Conquer the World campaigns, based on Alexander the Great, Napoleon, the New World and the Cold War. You can choose either side in each of the campaigns, and choose to do what you will with the conquered lands. Better yet, the first



#### **RACE TO THE FINISH**

Each of the new races comes with specific advantages. The Indians and Persians, for example, have elephant troops, rendering the standard pikemen just about useless in the earlier eras. The Indians have lower building costs and the Persians get two capitals and free taxation upgrades. The Americans get cheaper military upgrades, and their first wonder is built instantaneously. The Iroquois and the Lakota both specialise in guerilla warfare and raid attacks, on top of which the Iroquois have earlier access to governments and the Lakota receive food bonuses and free Cavalry upgrades. Last but not least, the Dutch, true to life, are masters of shipbuilding and seafaring meaning a distinct advantage with any sea battles.

three campaigns are a lot more localised than the Conquer the World mission offered in the core game, making them more compact and reducing the amount of time you have to spend on each one.

It's the Cold War, though, that really offers up something new. Fought between the Soviets and the Americans, you'll have the chance to utilise nuclear capabilities, espionage missions, diplomacy and, of course, the massing armies together and marching them across the battlefield to lay waste to your foes on a global scale all the while trying not to destroy the world in a fiery nuclear Armageddon.

Thrones & Patriots makes a big game even bigger. It doesn't iron out all the issues you may have had with Rise of Nations, but it does put a fairly tidy icing on an already tasty cake.

Michelle Starr

#### SYSTEM

#### NEED 500 MHz CPU 128 Mb RAM

16 Mb Videocard
1.5 GBz HDD space
WANT

#### 1 GHz CPU 256 Mb RAM 32 Mb Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

#### ONLINE

nuny riconinations on

Everything you need to know about taking over the world... mwahahaha!

#### RATING



#### OVERALL

Puts the crown on the King of Real Time Strategy

82





Developer: I-deal Games ■ Publisher: Auran ■ Distributor: Red Ant ■ Price: \$39.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

#### SYSTEM

NEED

Win 98/2000/XF PII 300 128 Mb RAM 4Mb Video 1Gb HD

#### WANT

PIII 600 256 Mb RAM 16Mb video

MULTIPLAYER

ONLINE www.strategyfirst. com/en/

hat the hell is such a venerable game doing, getting an expansion pack in early 2004? If nothing else it is a sign of the loyalty and devotion of its' many fans around the world that Jagged Alliance 2 can still inspire such an effort. Wildfire actually began life as a fan mod created by a fellow named Serge Popoff who did such a great job with it that developer I-Deal Games decided to help out and brought it to the attention of Canadian company Strategy First. Strategy First had acquired some properties from Sir-Tech another Canadian company and the original publisher of JA & JA2 and were thinking about creating a third sequel to the series. Wildfire seemed the perfect way to introduce themselves to the JA community and to whet fans appetite for a possible JA 3.

#### Mercs

Jagged Alliance 2 was released in late 1998 at a time when America's main foreign policy initiatives concerned stopping drug cartels and exporting action movies, and sometimes exporting action movies about stopping drug cartels. A lot has happened since then and it is kind of funny that the narcotics theme which was once such a cliché seems almost refreshing in Wildfire,



after playing countless terrorist scenarios in various games.

Your merc team is back in Arulco for this assignment but things have changed a lot since your last visit. The overall theme of Wildfire is to make the combat side of the game more true to life and to write in a lot more depth in the form of side quests and other details. Towns are much bigger and enemies more numerous. The easiest difficulty level in Wildfire for example gives you twice as many enemies as the normal level in JA2!

The weapons, of which there are some nifty new additions, do more lifelike amounts of damage and therefore have to be treated with more respect in the hands of your opponents. If you cruised through JA2 without using much in the way of tactics you will hit a brick wall pretty quickly in Wildfire. The increased threat levels and weapon lethality pretty much force you to use all the cunning you can muster to clear out maps without taking too much lead yourself.

Nighttime ambushes are an essential part of this new style of gameplay. Position your men carefully, place some light sticks on the ground where the bad guys are going to come from and then fire off a few shots to get their attention. Stealth mercs who you may have overlooked for your parties in previous games are a must in Wildfire for their one hit kill abilities, and as grenades are much more powerful here mercs who can throw them well are also handy.

#### Tilina

Wildfire includes some new graphic tile sets most of which are for the urban areas. Outdoor areas have also been rejigged with more long grass and tree cover to help your people hide from their enemy's lethal gunfire. Combat isn't the only challenge

#### **COMMUNITY SPIRIT**

In an effort to keep the JA2 community alive and kicking until they get JA3 out the door Strategy First has included all the source code for JA2 with the Wildfire package. This means that any budding modder can create their own game without having to analyze and decompile everything themselves. Wildfire is one example of what can be done, Urban Chaos is another: http://www.jamodsquad.com/ english/index.htm If the idea if fiddling about with source code seems a bit daunting the forums at the Bear Pit: http://www.ja-galaxy-forum.com/cgibin/ubb/ultimatebb.cgi have a lot of information and helpful members!

you face though as Wildfire includes a new political aspect which must be handled carefully if you want to win. It's all about loyalty and and how much of it each town gives to you. Completing quests in each area will win the people over and greatly aid your efforts.

JA2: Wildfire has enough new material and new ideas to make any JA2 fan very happy and as it includes the full original JA2 game as well, will hopefully help introduce a new bunch of gamers to this great series. As you can see from the screenshots this is a very basic looking game by today's standards but it is also living proof of the adage that gameplay is more important than graphics. There are some minor bugs and balancing issues that are being addressed in an upcoming patch but nothing serious, as in game stopping. There is a lot more in Wildfire than we've had room to mention, go see for yourself!

**George Soropos** 

#### RATING



OVERALL Wildfire is pretty much everything a JA2 fan could have asked for



oodness, is that déjà vu? This is the second time in a row that Codemasters have made PC gamers wait over a year to get their hands on their latest Colin McRae Rally title. Both 03 and 04 debuted on console a full year before the PC versions, and both made it to the PC platform virtually identical to the console versions. We're sure that those masters of code aren't so incompetent that it takes a full 12 months to change some textures and implement net code, so we're left wondering: Why such a long delay? Why torture the PC gaming community? Whilst you beat your head with the game box trying to figure it out, let's take a look at what Colin McRae Rally 04 has to offer 12 months down the track...

There were many grumpy PC gamers





# Codemasters realised it would be criminal to not include online multiplayer and LAN play

the day that 03 finally made it to PC, completely unchanged over the console version. The menus were still designed to be navigated with a game controller, and there was no multiplayer except for splitscreen play on the one PC! Truly abysmal. A slap in the face to PC gamers, even. Well, 04 makes up for that horrid installment, but just barely. It still took 12 months to get here after debuting on console (okay, we'll stop harping on about that now), and it's still exactly the same game. However, this time around, Codemasters actually realised that it would be criminal to not include online multiplayer and LAN play. The result is a version of Colin McRae Rally for PC that allows up to 8 people to race together over a LAN or over the internet. Otherwise, despite some graphical improvements, 04 offers nothing new over last year's console version.

But despite all that, 04 is definitely a major improvement over 03 in terms of overall gameplay. Handling has been



improved, there's a more satisfying damage model, a more comprehensive service area for tinkering with your fourwheeled beast and the option during rallies to be involved in "parts testing" where you race to acquire special upgrades for your car. Another major difference is that 03 only allowed you to race in Colin's official car at the time, whilst in 04 you can initially choose from seven different cars to take on rally - the Peugeot 206, Ford Puma, Fiat Punto, Mitsubishi Lancer EVO VII, Subaru Impreza WRX, VW Rallye Golf and Citroen Xsara Rally car. Not exactly an authentic choice of cars, but at least there's variety here. Plus, they all look and feel great to drive.

In some ways, it feels like 04 is Codemasters' way of saying "sorry" to gamers for the lightweight and rather crap CMR 03. Even so, 04 doesn't quite go far enough to make it stand out as an essential rally title. It has a brilliant blend of arcade and simulation rally racing, but it still feels like the same old Colin McRae Rally. It's extremely 'no frills' rally racing that is starting to feel a little too dated and a little too bare of options, features and game modes. Thankfully, Colin McRae Rally 05 is coming out this year, so we can hopefully expect it to make bigger strides towards a more robust rally simulation. Of course, it's been announced for consoles only at this stage...

**Eliot Fish** 

#### SYSTEM

#### NEED

PIII/Athlon 750Mhz 256MB RAM 32MB video card 3GB HD space

#### WANT

PIII/Athlon 1.4Ghz 512MB RAM 64MB or higher video card Soundblaster Audigy 2

#### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

#### ONLINE

He's not in Colin McRae Rally 04, but he lives on inside the Internet at this website for codrivers. We like the spinning wheel menu!

#### RATING



#### OVERALL

Big improvements are really needed instead of these yearly incremental updates.



# **TECH IN REVIEW**

y review of the Logitech MX-510 mouse this month raised an ugly problem that I usually try my best to forget about. That problem: when does a piece of hardware give a gamer an unfair advantage over other gamers? Sometimes the answer is clear cut, such as the ELSA video card that came out a couple of years ago with drivers that let you see through walls. Just because they were officially sanctioned by a hardware manufacturer didn't make them any less of a scum-swilling cheat.

But then we have the area of high performance components. Some would argue that just having a top end PC gives a gamer an unfair advantage. As somebody who upgrades their PC every other month, I fall into that category. My reply to those who whine about my hardware giving me an artificial edge is usually along the lines of "Get a job you useless leach, and then you'll be able to afford a nice PC. And stop blaming the hardware for your high level of suckiness". Yet I understand where they're coming from really, I do! Unfortunately it's the nature of PC gaming that this problem is always going to be present, and my only answer is that if you can't beat 'em, sell narcotics so you can afford to ioin 'em.

The MX-510 raised these concerns once again, as it makes aiming so much more accurate. My solution to the problem? Simple really - I went out, sold some crack and purchased my own MX-510...

Bennett Ring Deputy Editor



ATI RADEON X800 PRO

- **90** JBL Creature II speakers
- 90 JBL Duet speakers
- 92 Zalman Reservator
- 94 Neuston Virtuoso MC-500
- 94 Logitech MX-510
- **96** nYko AirFlo gamepad
- **96** Restore-A-Disc
- 98 RADEON X800 PRO shootout

#### **HOW WE TESTED**

For an in-depth explanation of how we test video cards, CPUs, and motherboards head to our PowerTools section on page 104. You'll also see a list of hardware that makes up the PCPP testbenches, which are used for the testing of the majority of our hardware.

Where possible we use benchmarks based on real world games to test hardware performance; this way we know for sure which component will give you the best gaming experience. We don't love hardware for hardware's sake – it's all about using this hardware to make your entertainment

even more, well, entertaining. We also try to compare the review product with the current "best of class" piece of hardware, so at the end of the day you'll know exactly which product offers you the best bang for buck.

For a product to earn a Power Award, price be damned, we're just looking at how this product performs. If there's nothing better, that we've seen at least, it'll get the Power Award. However, if a product offers a great level of performance or features for a very reasonable price, it'll get the Value Award. Simple, really.



Flash BIOS automatically with just one click







First hardware-based audio enhancement software for onboard sound

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BlackBOX

Intelligently adjusts CPU fan speed according to system load and temperature

Records vital system information olesterril Windows-based overclocking utility

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- Support IEEE 1394, USB 2.0, Gigabit Lan, AGP 8X
- ABIT OTES™ Cooling System
- ABIT uGuru™ Technology





- Supports AMD Athlon XP/ Athlon /Duron CPU
- nVidia nForce2 Ultra 400 chipset with MCP-T
- Support Socket A, 266/333/400 MHz FSB
- 3 DIMM support Dual Channel DDR 400 memory
- 2-channel SATA support 150 Raid 0/1
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### **JBL Creature II**

#### • Price: \$199 • Distributor: BBS Electronics www.bbs.com.sg • URL: www.jbl.com

ith a novel looking with a novel looking subwoofer, and itsy bitsy satellites, this is one funky looking Creature. The important thing to realise is that those satellites are more like tweeters than speakers, and they are truly tiny. I half-

expected a 'Choking hazard for children under 3' sticker to be plastered across 'em.

One of the satellites contains the volume controls. Quite a nifty implementation if slightly flawed. There are two touch sensitive switches, one to increase, one to decrease, and pressing both simultaneously mutes the volume. You'll need to get to the subwoofer to find the bass and treble controls though. The speakers aren't your usual ambidextrous variety either. There's

left and right plugs. No longer need you stand on your head to orientate your ears to the onscreen action.

a distinct difference between the

Unfortunately, the diminutive size of the satellites impacts on

both the useability and the performance of this setup. Unless you can do mental Pythagoras Theorem and are happy to constantly nudge them back into position, you must be extremely gentle when getting intimate with

but they really should be louder to do the system full justice. It's a pity it's not a true 2.1 system, with a separate channel for the sub, so the listener could have tweaked this out to their satisfaction.

The subwoofer is a downward

the above mentioned controls. Purists may also be annoyed by the speaker click that results from this finger to circuit relationship, but at least it lets you know you've got your finger on the pulse. Audio-wise, the satellites are ok,

firing unit, which is a curious choice for a PC platform. This arrangement normally works best where you're further away from the unit, not up close and personal. Kind of like a long distance relationship that actually works. The woofer isn't perfect, but it's certainly decent. It's got plenty of juice, though it's not quite as responsive as it could be, and therefore trips over some of the more complex and distinct sounds. Connoisseurs will notice, especially at higher volumes, the lack of punch, some distortion and a bit of hissing at idle, but it's still reasonable for AVRILs, RPGs, exploding barrels, or anything else

Jason Brown

#### **SPECIFICATIONS**

Terrorist's Cookbook.

Satellite Output: 9W x 2

you can find recipes for in the

- · Subwoofer: 27W
- · Speaker type: Aluminium cone transducers
- Frequency Response: 45 20kHz

#### **PCPP** Score

Average sound, and it really needs a fader control, but it's got the look!

# **JBL Duet Two Piece Speaker System**

#### • Price: \$99 • Distributor: BBS Electronics www.bbs.com.sg • URL: www.jbl.com

6:15AM, mid-winter, on some backwater road and my twowheeler is running on fumes. My throat feels like I swallowed an icicle, and my cheeks are pure collagen. With relief, I pull into a one-pump petrol station and quench my Honda's thirst. I walk into the shop and fork over the cash, the old coot takes it and gives me some change. I go to say 'Thank you', but what emerges from my frozen throat is a coarse four letter insult, thanks to the evil imaginary snowmen clamping down on my jaws. "WHAT did you say?', he menaces in response to the accidental abuse. I hear the Banjo tune from 'Deliverance', and hightail it out of there.

Clarity of sound is important and these desktop speakers have at least that going for them. They may look like spaceships from Planet X (or more like Planet Eggs actually), but they offer clear and crisp high/mid tones, uncommon in speaker sets deprived of the ubiquitous '.1' in their title. There

Stylish and stable, but they're

still desktop speakers.

is a slightly discernible bass component to their output, perhaps marginally more than the standard for 2.0 sets, but it's not enough to sound off about. You won't get much rumble from your games, but in-game sounds are tight and have bite. The lack of bass translates to average performance musically, at least from modern tunes, and DVDs aren't even close to ear shattering. Happily there's virtually no distortion throughout their range, and hiss is almost non-existent unless you put your ear right up to the speakers and really pump them up. All in all, they're competent but not extraordinary performers.

They're shy of a headphone jack, and there's no option to adjust anything other than the volume. They also have an

#### **SPECIFICATIONS**

- Power Output: 12W total
- Signal-to-Noise Ratio: > 80dB
- Frequency Response: 60Hz-20kHz



external powerpack, which may or may not please you. It means a bit more clutter, but lessens the chance of monitor or speaker interference. If you don't have the funds or floorspace for a 2.1 or greater system, then these

speakers are good enough for the average gamer, however they won't satisfy the rumble reliant or the control conscious. But boy do those banjos sound sweet...Dee diddle dee diddle dee did dee...

**Jason Brown** 

**PCPP** Score



PC4000 500Mhz / PC4400 550Mhz Dual Channel Ultra Platinum Kit

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6 Layers Ultra Low Noises Shielded PCB board. 30 micro-inches of gold on the pins

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## **Zalman Reserator 1 Fanless Water Cooling System**

• Price: \$350 • Distributor: Altech Computers www.altech.com.au • URL: www.zalmanusa.com

nyone not found Nemo? How about that scene where Nemo gummies up the fish tank filter and then does the great escape down the nylon tubing to safety? Each time I watch that scene, I cross my digits and hope that maybe, just maybe, he won't make it this time. I want to see Nemo sucked down the swirling vortex of death, riding the tubes, screaming all the way... until he face plants into a sizzling heatsink where he's instantly flash boiled into poached fish. Who's laughing now eh Clownfish?

Actually, I don't hate Nemo, not that much anyway, it's just that putting this Zalman kit together reminded me so much of my amateurish attempts at fishology, that comparisons were unavoidable. It goes together in much the same way as your basic aquarium setup.

But first, a basic primer on water cooling. You basically have a large, in this case a very large, water reservoir, fitted out with some form of Mad Maxist passive cooling feature. The Zalman's reservoir is aluminium and features fins, though not the Pixar kind, all over it. This particular reservoir includes a perfectly silent internal pump, which sends the cooling waters raging down through tubing to a large hollowed out heatsink or water block. As the block is

firmly attached to either your AMD or P4 CPU's head, the heat inherited is quickly whisked away with the rushing waters, back to the reservoir where it stagnates for a while, marinating in luke warmity, until it's time to do it all again.

Now this might sound kinda risky... large volumes of water, aquaphobic PC components, Murphy's law, fish anecdotes, but this unit sails the safest seas you'll find, thanks to some top notch components, working together for a totally dry PC.

Firstly, the reservoir reeks rather than leaks of design and manufacturing finesse. It's thick aluminium walls are as strong as the smell of a three day dead goldfish, and the fins especially

motorbike cylinder heads. And closing the lid to the reservoir makes you feel like you're closing the bulkhead on a submarine or a space shuttle - the engineering is truly worth admiring. The tubing that transports our water round to where it needs to go is semi-rigid. Stop smirking.

are mucho robusto. Forget visions

of broken car radiator grills, these

are more akin to lawn mower or

Enough that it won't kink too easily, but still pliable enough to make attachment of the all-

plate to tidy things up. The connectors lock in place well enough by clamping around the chassis, but you're left with a gaping hole in the slot. There's actually some irony in that, ie, a purposefully sealed unit leaving a hole in something else? It's just a little distressing to see a gaping hole that can't be readily filled.

The water block itself is sturdy, yet also stylish at the same time. It's gold plated to ensure that there are no negative chemical effects (just think of any

Harrier's vertical take-off inside the Sydney Opera House.

Enter the Zalman, and the same CPU went to 3.8, no problem, and even under heavy load, it stuck around the 50 degree mark. Now I know it's nowhere near the temp you'd get with one of the Krazy Kryogenic Kooling Kits, but for a nonrefrigerated solution, that's a heck of a lot of CPU life expectancy for a chip that's overclocked to its own hilt. All with enough peace and quiet that you'll think it's sleeping with the fishes!

Curiously, it actually ran slightly warmer at idle than a conventionally cooled rig, by about 2 degrees, but unless you're leaving your PC on to download Clownfish Sushi Recipes for Beginners at two in the morning that's probably not going to be a biggie.

This is a great water-cooled package for anyone with a bit of bread to spare. What I would have liked to have seen was some form of flow control alarm, and perhaps temperature dependent power switching to make this device truly sea-sponge worthy. And as for the next model and taking water to a new level, if rumours of the invention of transparent aluminium are proven true, then the water cooler/tropical fish aquarium is a no-brainer.





important connectors a piece of hake, or flake... The connectors are similar in design to the bits you use to patch your backyard hose to the tap, with most (though not all) being high quality stainless steel. You need to cut the tubing to length yourself, which is preferable in any case, as it gives you a bit more flexibility.

The one disappointment with the tubing concerns where it enters and leaves your case, via an empty PCl expansion slot. You don't get a custom designed cover words ending with the suffix 'ation'), and the tube connections are suitably, ahem, fitting. There's also a plastic flow

indicator that you'll probably never see once it's installed, as it's totally PC independent. Unless you stick it to the top of your rig but you probably won't as it's tacky enough without involving Blu-tac.

So it at least looks like it should function correctly, and it looks nice and mechtastic, but how does it perform? Well I'd have to say admirably. In terms of cooling power, while taking a 3.2 P4 to hell and back, it didn't even flinch. For comparison, this P4 is usually capable of reaching 3.67GHz with the best traditional air powered cooling you can borrow. Though to do that, your fan needs to rev at about 6000 RPM in order to keep the 1.7V core voltage from melting the chip at full load. Even then we're talking a tropical 67 degrees, and a sound not too different to a

#### **SPECIFICATIONS**

- Water capacity: 2.5L
- Water throughput: 300 L/H
- Audible volume level: Zip, Nada, Zilch!

**PCPP Score** 

An excellent and cool 'solution'. for a hot topic...





# Coolall Your Life

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# POLO12 410W

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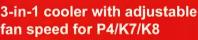
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  - 2) In Rear: PCI slot controller
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# **Logitech MX-510**

#### • Price: \$99 • Distributor: www.logitech.com • URL: www.logitech.com

et me say that this product has placed me in a moral dilemma. You see, I hate cheaters. Passionately. More than I hate your mother. Yet when I use this mouse, I feel like one of these godforsaken punks. My aim is so much truer, and my responses so much quicker, that it's as if this mouse has performed a cybernetic upgrade to my brain's targeting system, turning me into a leaner, more efficient killing machine. It's almost as if I'm running a targeting bot.

Thanks to its new "5.8 MX Optical Engine", the MX-510 sucks up 5.8 MegapixeIs of images per second, which is around 30% better than the previous generation of Logitech mice. It's also got a sensor that captures images 80% larger than other mice, and this really does help it to work better on more difficult surfaces, which

was quite evident during our testing. The 800dpi sensor also makes it great for high sensitivity gamers, compared to the 400dpi used on most other mice.

Unfortunately these beefy hardware specs mean that it had to be a cabled mouse, but the lengthy two metre cord means you shouldn't get cable snags on your PC desk anytime soon. But all of these specs don't mean squat at the end of the day, so the obvious thing to do was to test it out. And the ultimate test of quick reflexes and good aim is UT2K4's Instagib mode.

Usually I get my ass handed to me on a platter when I enter the BigPond Instagib server. Some of these guys make the Terminator

**SPECIFICATIONS** 

Optical Sensor

800dpi

• USB

equipped with the might of the MX-510, I regularly took out a spot in the top three, and even managed to win a round. It seemed that I only needed to will my crosshairs over an opponent and the MX-510 would do the rest for me.

look like Mr Magoo. Yet, when

I fired up a few other shooters and again was impressed by the

increased accuracy and control offered by this mouse. As a result I have no choice but to hang up my beloved MX-700 and declare the MX-510 as the finest gaming mouse. If you want to remain competitive there's simply no choice to make - without the MX-510 you're just another target.

**Bennett Ring** 



#### **PCPP** Score

Sheer mouse heaven, we kid you not

## **Neuston Virtuoso MC-500**

#### • Price: \$399 • Distributor: www.hyperreality.com.au • URL: www.neuston.com

et's state the problem that this device attempts to solve. You have a library of 'legally acquired' audio and video files, plus a whole stack of still image files shuffling around your hard drive. You see confinement to your PC in order to watch/listen to said files or wait 12 hours for tmpgenc to grind out a reasonable facsimile in a more versatile format as ultimate evils. You'd also like to browse that Internet thingy everyone's talking about, all from the comfy 10 degree inclination of your Jason recliner. Well if that's all you want, then problem solved.

This package will stream any of the above mentioned files direct

to one TV in your domicile. The unit itself is actually a portable remote PC, sans a hard disk, and relies upon a RISC processor to de-crunch the data stream back into pixels and tunes so your TV or 5.1 setup can do show and tell. It also outputs to standard stereo for the retro buffs.

Obviously the unit needs to stream the data to and from your PC somehow, and the options are quite impressive. A Cat 5 crossover cable back to your PC's network card or a patch cable to your network hub will do in a pinch. If you want to utilise the Internet features though, you'll

before leeching away. If you're WiFi capable, you could install one of the specifically supported (though not supplied) wireless network cards, thereby eliminating cables altogether.

This is first generation technology but it performs remarkably well considering. There was an occasional stutter from some mpeg files, and the remote control is fairly picky about where you point it, but otherwise it does a good job. Internet use is not as efficient as what you're accustomed to.

There's no keyboard other than the VCR-like remote. It integrates well with your web browser though, enabling you to easily navigate using your existing bookmarks and favourites. The interface does take a bit of acclimatisation, but once mastered, it's quite usable.

You can't toss out your DVD/CD players, but for the .media file hoarder, who loves to be at the forefront of the technology boom, it's a wave worth riding.

**Jason Brown** 

#### **SPECIFICATIONS**

- · Video output: Composite, Component, S-Video, SCART, DVI
- · Audio output: SPDIF Coax/Optical, Stereo
- · Video Format support:
- MPEG1/2/4, DivX, RMP4, MOV, AVI Audio Format support:
- MPEG1/2/3, Ogg, Wav, AAC, WMA
- Image support: JPG, GIF, PNG, BMP, TIFF

#### **PCPP** Score

A 1st gen product that actually works...wow. Finally, streaming video.





# **Xperience** True High Definition gaming







Do not sit idle. try the new graphic cards from Sapphire. There is no substitute.



#### **FREE GAMES**



Sapphire 9800XT and 9600XT comes bundled with Half life 2.

"Details inside box".





#### RADEON X800 XT

- 256MB of Xtreme performance GDDR3 memory 256-bit quad-channel GDDR3 memory interface
- Sixteen Xtreme parallel pixel pipelines
  Six programmable vertex shader pipelines
- True High Definition (HD) gaming

Features: New SMARTSHADER™ HD technology, SMOOTHVISION™ HD technology, 3Dc™, Unique VIDEOSHADER™ HD and HYPER Z™ HD



#### RADEON X800 PRO

- 256MB of Xtreme performance GDDR3 memory 256-bit quad-channel GDDR3 memory interface
- Twelve Xtreme parallel pixel pipelines
- Six programmable vertex shader pipelines True High Definition (HD) gaming

Features: New SMARTSHADER™ HD technology, SMOOTHVISION™ HD technology, 3Dc™, Unique VIDEOSHADER™ HD and HYPER Z™ HD



- 256MB DDR high performance two-channel DDR memory with 256-bit memory interface
- 128-bit floating-point colour precision allows for a greater range of colours and brightness
- 8 shader pipelines, delivering a fill rate of over 2.8 GigaPixels per second
- Supports the AGP 8X and AGP 4x standard,
- DirectX® 9.0 and OpenGL® functionality
   BUNDLED with HALF-LIFE 2 full retail version
  Features: SMARTSHADER 2.0 technology, SMOOTHVISION 2.1, Unique VIDEOSHADER engine



- 256MB DDR high performance two-channel DDR memory interface
  Optimised 128-bit 2D engine supported by 4
- rendering pipelines and 2 geometry engines Supports the AGP 8X and AGP 4x standard, DirectX® 9.0 and OpenGL®.
- BUNDLED with HALF-LIFE 2 full retail version
  Features: SMARTSHADER 2.0, SMOOTHVISION 2.1 technology



#### RADEON 9800 SE

- 128MB DDR memory with 128-bit memory
- 128MB Dux memory with 128-bit memory interface
   4-pipeline VPU in its 2nd generation
   Supports the new AGP 8X standard, providing a high-speed link between the graphics board and the rest of the PC (2.0 GB/sec)
   Features: SMARTSHADER 2.1, SMOOTHVISION 2.1,

VIDEOSHADER and FULLSTREAM



- RADEON 9600 SE

  128MB DDR memory with 64-bit memory
- 4-pipeline VPU in its 2nd generation
   Supports the new AGP 8X standard, providing a high-speed link between the graphics board and the rest of the PC (2.0 GB/sec)
   Features: SMARTSHADER 2.1, SMOOTHVISION 2.1,

VIDEOSHADER and FULLSTREAM



#### RADEON 9200 SE

- 128MB DDR memory

- 128MB DUR memory
   Driven by Quadpipe architecture
   Supports the AGP 8X and AGP 4x standard,
   DirectX® 9.0, OpenGL® functionality
   VIVO (Video-in and Video-Out)
   Features: SMARTSHADER, SMOOTHVISION,
  VIDEOSHADER and FULLSTREAM











TEL 08 9204 2388





## nYko AirFlo PC Gamepad

#### • Price: \$59.95 • Distributor: www.discdoctor.com.au • URL: www.nyko.com

ands up, if whilst playing gamepad orientated games, you sweat like a travel audited politician? Ok, hands down...errrr, please. The new age-old problem of slippery joypad abuse may soon be no more.

This gamepad has a 50mm fan built into its underbelly, which sucks air in, and circulates it through tiny holes scattered about the package. Not content to just keep your gaming extremities slick free, these holes also provide a little more traction and make the pad more holdable than other slippery suckers. You can set the fan speed via an easily accessible switch on the pad itself, to either off, low, or high. On the high setting, it feels like you're holding a pocket-powered twister, with the sound to match. On low, it also coped, well, I think 'no sweat' is the best way to describe it... and any noise was quickly drowned out by the quiet drone of an average cpu heatsink.

Installation is a 'breeze' (Groan -Ed). Plug it in and Windows quickly builds up the new profile without a hitch. I was extremely pleased to see how many buttons this doover has, thirteen in all. I mean, once you eliminate all the unimportant letters from the alphabet, like,

x,b,o,x,p,l,a,y,s,t,a,t,i,o,n, you could almost use this guy as a

keyboard! And the buttons are all quite responsive too, no sticking, no slipping, and all are nicely shaped to cater for the medium sized slabs that most ham fisted gamers seem to develop.

Eschewing the current console style of stick and d-pad placement, the two analog control sticks are right next to each other. Actually the analog controls are the only disappointment to this pad, as they're not as precise as they could be. They could use a bit more graduation and the dead zone is just a wee bit too large. A few laps of any driving game requiring a lot of finesse will make this obvious to you. The D-pad though functions perfectly, and made my ZSNES emulated Street

Fighter bouts a joy.

It's nice to see a manufacturer catering for PC gamers that don't have USB ports within easy reach. This pad comes with a whopping 10 foot long cord, and that's enough to wrap up this review.

**Jason Brown** 



**SPECIFICATIONS** 

- Buttons: 13, including analog stick buttons
- · Weight: 195g
- · Interface: USB...duh!

It blows, but doesn't blow...

**PCPP** Score

75

### **Restore-A-Disk**

#### • Price: \$79.95 • Distributor: Disc Doctor • URL: www.discdoctor.com.au

n a lot of ways, we're lucky enough to have 20/20 hindsight vision these days. MS-Word has an Undo, net browsers have a Back button, and VCRs have Rewind/Replay buttons. Unfortunately, there's no way to take back what happens when your toddler traipses around your ceramic tiled floor using your FarCry CDs as snow-shoes... well maybe there is.

This disk scratch repair unit is one of the most desirable of its kind to appear so far. It looks and operates more or less like a portable DVD player. After inserting an appropriate scrubbing wheel (clean, repair, or polish) and a little cutting compound, you merely drop in the Picasso'd CD, push a button, and let it hum. When it stops two minutes later, you eject the CD and check the results. The instructions

markings do result. Giving it another go with the medium scrubbers tidies them up reasonably. In our tests, some of our harshest '2 bob jobs' couldn't be repaired, but most of the realistic scratches were remedied, even if not completely removed.

Interestingly, this is an Australian designed unit and it's

suggest starting with the medium

'repair' pads, and then moving to the stronger polish pads if your first

attempt fails. Small circular

Australian designed unit and it's great to see some locals making similar technology to what VideoEzy use to patch up their DVDs, available to the masses. And you needn't wait until disaster strikes to get some use out of it, as

#### **SPECIFICATIONS**

- Repair fluid: Aluminium oxide
- Umm, that's about it really....

Like carrying around a book of Resurrection +1.

89



it also has a 'clean' mode to take care of those rentals that someone used to clean their toenails and butter their toast with.

There's little bad to say about this unit. It won't heal the worst of scratches but light and medium come up fine. You should get 10-20 disks worth of repairs from the supplied pads, and \$14.95 will get you enough replacements to save about the same again. Oh, it also brought a hopelessly lost 'Pride and Prejudice' CD soundtrack back to life, but I'll try not to hold that against it.

**Jason Brown** 

**PCPP** Score



# BLACK TIE OPTIONAL.

Stunning good looks. That's what will impress you immediately about the new MX5021 Powered Audio System. It brings elegance to the PC, TV, home theater or home audio, with graceful curves and a classic piano finish. But, as you know, looks are only skin deep. What really matters is sound, and MX5021 sound is simply top of the line. Two custom-designed midrange drivers in each speaker produce extremely responsive sound, while the horn-loaded tweeters offer extra wide, crystal-clear dispersion of the high frequencies. An ample subwoofer rounds out the sound. And the system's THX® certification assures cinema-quality sound. No wonder the MX5021 is considered one of Altec Lansing's best 2.1 powered audio solution yet.



#### ALSO FEATURING:

FX6021 Concert-style fidelity in a home system!



VS4121 Compact design, awesome performance in a 7-driver system!



"plug+play"











Please contact your local distributor below for your local dealer:



9837 2500





INGRAM





3257 3211



9382 2866





8542 8888



N.Z. **All States** 

448 2378

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#### **ATI RADEON X800 PRO**

Bennett Ring checks out an ATI high end card that won't cost you a kidney.





n last month's PCPP we declared ATI's X800XT as the new king of video cards, pipping NVIDIA's GeForce 6800 Ultra to the post by the smallest of margins. However, you're going to be forced to pay a premium for these levels of performance - in the region of around \$900 from what we can gather. Unfortunately not everybody is on the same salary as the "We'll Save You!" fat guy from the Aussie Home Loan advertisements, and these people might find it hard to justify spending quite so much cash on a video card. This month sees the release of the slightly less powerful but still amazingly fast X800 PRO, which is slightly less second mortgage inducing.

There's one main difference between this card and the more expensive X800XT, and that's the number of pixel pipelines. What the heck is a pixel pipeline? To put it in the simplest of terms, a pipeline is a part of the GPU (graphics processing unit) that works on one pixel at a time. Multiple pipelines work in parallel, which means they all work together at the same time on different pixels. Each pipeline also has one or more texture units, allowing a texture to be applied to each pixel (known as a Texel). This definition is incredibly simplified, and will no doubt make 3D engineers incredibly angry. In some instances it's not quite correct, as GPU architectures don't always fit such simple definitions. It's not wise to use this definition to compare very different architectures, but when comparing the new X800 PRO to the

X800XT it'll do. Obviously, the more pipelines you have, the better (well, if you consider that each pipeline can do an equal amount of work, which isn't always the case, but we're not even going to go into that!).

Architecturally, the X800 PRO is basically identical to the X800 PRO, but it has 4 of the 16 pipelines found in an X800XT deactivated, leaving it with 12 pixel pipelines. It could be that the chip didn't quite pass the quality testing and was found to have flaws in certain pipelines, or if the manufacturing process is very efficient with high yields, ATl can simply choose to switch off one set of 4 pipelines. As we saw with the previous generation of ATI products, there are mods that can be performed to the X800 PRO that unlock these 4 pipelines, but you risk killing your video card during the delicate procedure.

We'll forgive you for predicting that the X800 PRO would be 25% slower than the X800XT as it only has 75% of the pipelines, but then we'd laugh at you behind your back at your obvious lack of hardware knowledge. In actual fact, the performance decrease won't always be this much as there are other bottlenecks in the video card that come into play. And considering how bloody fast the X800XT is, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the X800 PRO should also be a speed demon. There is also another, minor difference between this card and the XT version - it has slightly lower memory (950MHz) and GPU (475MHz) speeds. Let's see how performance has been changed.

We're going to be changing our benchmark suite over the next couple of months to reflect the arrival of several new games, so you'll notice that we didn't use the same tests as outlined in our PowerTools section. All tests were conducted on the same PC as last month's X800XT review, so that we could directly compare results (1S7 motherboard, 512MB DDR-400 and a 3.4GHz Pentium 4). However, there was one main difference, and that was the use of the latest ATI Catalyst drivers (4.5), as the 4.4 drivers used when testing the X800XT did not recognise the X800 PRO. These drivers contain optimisations for FarCry, so the X800 PRO actually outpaced the X800XT results in this case. We could not retest the X800XT with the new drivers as there was only one of these cards in the country at the time of writing. and we'd already had our turn with it the month before.

The first test was 3DMark2001SE, and our results showed that the X800 PRO wasn't far behind the X800XT, with a performance lag of around 5%, even at the highest resolution of 1600 x 1200. Next up was the controversial 3DMark03, and as a result of its more intensive shader utilisation showed a significantly higher difference, of up to 40%. FarCry

showed a strange result due to the use of the new drivers, with the X800 PRO leading the X800XT by around 15%. Even though we can't compare these results with the X800XT, they show that the X800 PRO is more than fast enough to run FarCry well. Our final non-eye candy test was UT2K4, and the X800 PRO was equal to the X800XT until the resolution increased to 1600 x 1200, and even then it only lagged behind by a few percent.

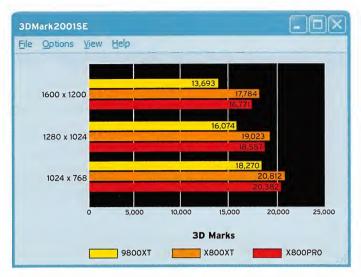
Anisotropic filtering didn't show much of a performance hit, with the X800 PRO keeping within 10% of the X800XT. Antialiasing performance wasn't quite as lucky, with the X800 PRO lagging behind by around 25% at the highest level. When it comes to beating the 9800XT, the X800 PRO offers marked performance increases, often topping it by 50% at the highest resolutions and image quality settings.

As you can see, the X800 PRO delivers excellent performance at a reasonable price. However, it remains to be seen if NVIDIA's 6800CT, which should be selling around the same price point, can outperform it. Stay tuned for the PCPP review in upcoming months.

#### PCPP Score

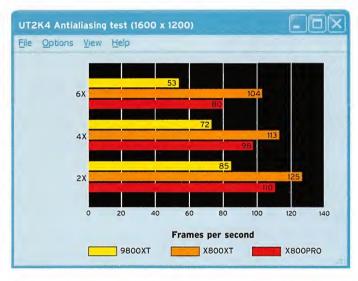
Almost as fast as an X800XT in many circumstances, but a couple of hundred bucks cheaper. The high end card for rational people.

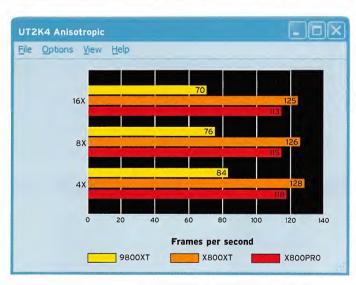














#### Sapphire RADEON X800 PRO

www.achieva.com.au Price: \$699

Sapphire haven't packed too many goodies into this package, with the only software of note being PowerDVD 5 and Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness (urgh!), which probably accounts for the low price. It's got the same cables as every other pack.

#### GeXCube Radeon X800 PRO CSCZ Platinum Edition

www.gecube.com.tw Price: \$799

As well as an S-Video cable, A/V cable and S-Video to HDTV RGB cable, a copy of Counterstrike Condition Zero is bundled with this card. Which the X800 PRO should cut through with ease. It also comes with either Black Hawk Down or Yager.

#### MSI RX800 X800 PRO

www.msicomputer.com.au Price: \$799

This is the king of software bundles, with Prince of Persia, URU, and XIII. However, be warned that the 14 in 1 disk is actually comprised of demos, not full versions of the games. As seen in the other packs, S-Video cable, A/V cable and S-Video to HDTV RGB cable are all included.

#### HIS Excalibur X800 PRO

www.akatech.com.au Price: \$779

Anyone for a dash of Arx Fatalis? That's the only game that ships with this bundle, as well as a 5 in 1 demo disk. PowerDVD 5 helps soften the blow, but this is also available in competing products. The standard range of cables is also included.

#### Bennett Ring

## **PowerTools**

while it would make our jobs a heck of a lot easier if we could review hardware based on the shininess of the packaging it arrives in, we're pretty sure our beloved readers are a little more interested in how the hardware actually performs. Which is why we have the PC PowerPlay PowerTools - batteries not included.

If you're anything like us, you probably don't give a rat's arse if Word will open three seconds faster on the new Pentium 64.

or if you can compress a zip file more speedily using DDR6-8000 memory. Nope, this is PowerPlay, so it's all about how well your games will perform.

Our PowerTools are broken into two categories, videocard tests and CPU/motherboard /memory tests, and you'll notice that most of these are based on real world game engines. We spoke to Intel, AMD, NVIDIA and ATI about which games to use to benchmark our hardware, and

after tossing out their biased recommendations settled on the following applications for the majority of our tests. Actually, we used the benchmarks that competing companies both agreed upon, to help make sure our tests can't be accused of favouring one flavour of hardware over another.

Of course, every now and then a unique piece of hardware will arrive that can't be tested properly using these applications, and in these circumstances we'll use the most appropriate benchmarking software.

We also use test benches (a fancy way of saying a PC outside of a case, waiting to electrocute unsuspecting hardware noobs), standardised hardware platforms that ensure our benchmark results can be compared to each other month after month. Check out the box below to see what components we use in our test benches.

#### CPU Tests 3D Mark03 CPU test

Nobody can deny that this CPU test is a nice way to give processors a thorough workout. And hey, it's easy to use and free - 'nuff said.

#### **Jedi Knight 2**

We couldn't ignore a benchmark that includes lightsabres. We run this test at low resolution (640x480), with texture details lowered, and geometry details maxed out.

#### [H]ardOCP Unreal Tournament 2003 test 2.1

We run the CPU test of this benchmark at low resolution, and it's one of the finest indicators of CPU performance available.

#### **Comanche 4**

It sucked as a game, but as a CPU/motherboard/memory benchmark this is a beauty. We run at 640x480 resolution to make sure it's the CPU that's carrying the load.

#### Videocard tests Aquamark 3

There ain't nothing sexier than pixel

shaders baby, and this benchmark uses a wad of DX9 shaders. You can almost hear your video card squeal in pain when running this test.

#### 3DMark2001 SE v330

An excellent DirectX 8.1 benchmark, we're still waiting for games to look this bloody good. Unlike its newer sibling, 2001SE doesn't have a reputation for being incredibly biased. We run this test at a variety of resolutions.

#### Halo

Considering this was a port from the NVIDIA powered Xbox, we were quite surprised to see ATI give this DX9 benchmark the thumbs up. Which is fine by us, as this is one game that will seriously test even the fastest of video cards.

#### [H]ardOCP Unreal Tournament 2003 test

Crank up the resolution and set the benchmark to High Quality mode, and you've got a test that will bring both ATI and NVIDIA products to their knees. This is also the test that we use for anisotropic filtering and anti-aliasing tests.

#### **TEST BENCHES**

Intel Test Bench (x2)
Intel Pentium 4 2.6C

HIS RADEON 9700 PRO

www.akatech.com.au

Corsair 2 x 256MB XMS3200LL

www.altech.com.au

Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 160GB ATA100 Hard Drive

www.seagate.com

ABIT IS7 865PE motherboard

www.altech.com.au

TOPOWER 470W PSU

www.auspcmarket.com.au

Mitsubishi Diamond View 2115e 21" monitor

www.milsablahlcom.av

Microsoft multimedia keyboard and optical mouse

www.mierosoft.com.au

Windows XP Professional

www.microseft.com.au

AMD Test Bench (x1)
AMD Athlon XP 2600+

HIS RADEON 9700 PRO

www.akalech.com.au

Corsair 2 x 256MB XMS3200LL

www.altech.com.au

Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 160GB ATA100 Hard Drive

www.seagate.com

ABIT NF7-S

www.aitech.com.au

TOPOWER 470W PSU

www.auspemarket.com.a

Mitsubishi Mitsubishi Diamond View 2115e 21" monitor

www.mitsubishi.com

Microsoft multimedia keyboard and optical mouse

www.microsoft.cem.au

Windows XP Professional

#### Image Quality testing:

We also use a Sony G520 21" CRT monitor for the image quality testing of video cards.



www.akatech.com.au



www.corsairmicro.com



www.auspcmarket.com.au



www.intel.com









www.abit.com.tw

www.amd.com

www.seagate.com



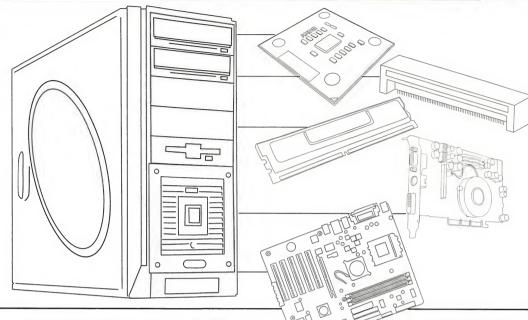
www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au



#### Stuart Calvin

# Decrypt

single beep from your PC's speaker at startup is a wonderful sound to hear. Just ask anyone who has ever turned on their PC to hear several sweet beeps and then suffered the anguish of nothing. Every PC comes with the Basic Input Output System (BIOS) pre-installed on the system board. Board manufacturers work closely with BIOS manufacturers to ensure that the information stored in the BIOS is specific to the needs and components of each system board. Here's this month's DeCryption of some common BIOS terminology. It's important for you to know which BIOS software is used in your specific PC - terms differ between manufacturers, so Google around before fiddling. Gotta go to the BIOS? Read on...



AGP Aperture Size: The aperture is a portion of the PCI memory address range that is dedicated for use as AGP memory address space. The aperture size determines the amount of system memory that can be allocated to the AGP graphics card for texture storage. Note that the AGP aperture is merely address space, not actual physical memory in use. It is very common to hear people recommending that the AGP aperture size should be half the size of system memory - bzzt! Adrian's Rojakpot recommends 68-128MB despite the amount of video memory you may have.

AGP Driving Control: Allows you to set whether the AGP controller should dynamically adjust the AGP driving strength or allow manual configuration by the BIOS. Manual configuration of the AGP drive strength may be necessary to get certain AGP 4X/8X cards to work properly.

#### AGP master 1 WS (read/write):

Allows you to reduce the time the AGP bus-mastering device has to

before the CPU must wait for the PCI bus cycles to finish. When disabled, the CPU must wait after each write cycle until the PCI bus signals that it is ready to receive more data.

Delay DRAM Read Latch: It finetunes the DRAM timing parameters to adjust for different DRAM loadings. The DRAM load changes with the number as well as the type of memory modules installed. DRAM loading increases as the number of memory modules increases. It also increases if you use double-sided modules instead of single-sided ones. In short, the more DRAM devices you use, the greater the DRAM loading

Delayed Transaction: To meet PCI 2.1 compliance, the PCI maximum target latency rule must be observed. According to this rule, a PCI 2.1-compliant device must service a read request within 16 PCI clock cycles for the initial read and 8 PCI clock cycles for each subsequent read. It allows for support of delay transaction cycles.

#### P2C/C2P Concurrency/PCI Concurrency: When

Enabled more than 1 PCI device can be active at a time. This involves enabling extra read/write buffering. The PCI bus can also obtain access cycles for small data transfers without the delays caused by renegotiating bus access for each part of the transfer, so is meant to improve performance and consistency.

Passive Release: Passive release is intended to lower CPU utilisation by allowing bus mastering devices to access RAM interleaved with CPU accesses. Useful when playing multimedia files.

**PCI VGA Palette Snoop:** This option must be set to Enabled if any ISA adapter card installed in the computer requires snooping.

**RAM Timings:** CAS Latency determines one particular access time for your RAM. The lower the latency, the faster and more frequently the computer is able to

would with changing the CAS latency.

RAS Precharge Time: This setting determines the number of cycles the RAM requires between DRAM refreshes to accumulate its charge. A lower setting here will speed up the system memory, at the risk of causing instability.

**SDRAM Precharge Control:** This setting determines how the computer manages the precharging times for the SDRAM.

Read around write: This is a DRAM optimisation feature. If a memory read is addressed to a location whose latest write is being held in a buffer before being written to memory, the read is satisfied through the buffer contents, and the read is not sent to the DRAM. Set this to Enabled for better performance.

**Speed error hold:** When the CPU speed setting is wrong and this is enabled, the system will hold.



# XtremeOverclockers

Viper1337- as pictured left. CPU: Pentium4 - 2.6Ghz at 3.1Ghz 17" Samsung 172n TFT. Case, K/Board, Mouse: Thermaltake Lanfire Asus Radeon 9800XT 256mb. - Modem, Speakers, CD-RW, DVD-ROM Ram: Crosair Twin-X DDR PC3200 512mb Low Lat. Kit. Win XP-Pro HDD: Dual 80GB SATA Drives in Raid-0, 160GB Superfast Retrieval. Asus P4C800DXE. Gamers Dream PC, Built by serious Gamers.

InfernoPC. CPU: Amd Athlon 2.5Ghz at 3.1Ghz.
r Screen: Samsung 753dfx 17inch CRT. Case: Vtech (dual neons)
Video: Asus 9600XT 128mb. Ram: KingstonDDR 256mb PC3200
Hard Disk: 80GB 7200rpm ATA Drive. Windows XP Home.
Mainboard: Asus A7V8X. Modem, Speakers, DVD-ROM.

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THE BEAST



#### **In association with Altech Computers**

Welcome to PCPP's Beast page, where we give you the blueprints for three very different PCs, each catering to a different wallet thickness and/or level of technical knowledge.

For those with extra phat, well padded money holders, look no further than the Beast. You'll be hard pressed to find a faster machine, but you'll pay through the nose for the privilege. Then there's the Mutant, for those who don't mind a bit of tinkering and overclocking. It offers the best balance between price and performance. Finally we have the Beastie. Cheap it may be, but slow it certainly is not.



#### CPU, MEMORY AND MOTHERBOARD

#### AMD Athlon FX-53 CPU

Goodbye Intel, hello AMD. The FX-53 is bloody expensive, but the fact that it's the fastest gaming processor around meant we had no choice but to fit out The Beast with this speed demon.



#### Asus SK8N

Yep, it's one incredibly expensive motherboard, but that's what you have to put up with when you want the best of the best. At least you'll know that it's of the highest quality.

\$412 www.asus.com.tw



#### Antec TruePower 550W

\$79 www.zalman.co.kr

Zalman 7000A-Cu

screamingly loud.

The Beast is so chunky, so wild and

untameable that you need a real man's

cooler stuck on the top of your mighty

metal that performs well and isn't too

CPU. Zalman delivers, offering a chunk of

With 550 watts of blistering power you can plug in as many crazy case fans, cooling systems and front-mounted LCD panels as you like and still enjoy smooth, reliable gaming.

\$200 www.antec-inc.com



#### 1GB Corsair TWINX-3200LL ECC Registered

The FX-51 demands only the finest in registered memory, and a Gig of the stuff for a mere \$560 is quite simply a bargain. It's Corsair as well, so it must be pretty good, right?

\$560 www.corsairmemory.com

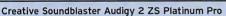


#### **VIDEO, AUDIO AND CONNECTIVITY**

#### XpertVision RADEON 9800XT PRO 256MB

With more onboard memory than some people's whole PC, the latest in the RADEON family will get your FSAA performance up and keep it up.

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It's straight up and down, it's cheap, it's fast, it works well and you need it to copy - sorry, back up -DVDs using your nifty writer.

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#### 2x Western Digital 74GB Raptor WD740D RAID 0

Sure, they're not the biggest hard drives on the planet, but they're arguably the fastest. And with a name like Raptor, it's obvious they were created just for our Beast.

\$860 www.westerndigital.com



SAMSUN

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#### 17" Samsung 172x

It's might only be a 17" monitor, but it has the viewable area of a 19" CRT, at a fraction of the size. Blurring is a thing of the past due to the 12ms response time. \$900 www.samsung.com.au



#### MS Wireless Optical Elite Desktop Pack

Keyboards and mice don't get much snazzier than this delectable combo.

\$210 www.microsoft.com.au



#### Antec P160

This beast of a case is perfect for a beast of a PC. A couple of temperature guages on the front make it perfect for letting you know when your system is about to explode.

\$250 www.antec-inc.com



#### Panasonic PT-AE500E

Who needs a piddly monitor when this baby will throw a high resolution (1280 x 720) image 2.5m wide across the closest wall? The ultimate gaming experience.

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### **BEAST VALUE:**

\$10957

# INATUM EHT

Thanks to the popularity of overclocking and tweaking, we've included this machine to show you exactly what you can get away with for not much outlay. Tweaked to within an inch of its life, this is the machine we DO own, versus the Beast, which is the machine we'd like to be able to AFFORD to own.

Intel P4 2.6GHz "C" at 3.3GHz
Truly the most overclockable of all modern CPUs, the 2.6C can be run a staggering 700MHz over its stock speed. With the standard Intel HSF. Now that's value. \$300 www.intel.com



Abit AI7
An 865PE based mobo from Abit, the AI7 has a very handy feature in that you can overclock your system directly from the Windows desktop. Which means you needn't delve into the confusing BIOS options ever again.

\$195 www.abit.com.tw



#### MS Wireless Optical Elite Desktop Pack

Sure, this combo isn't exactly cheap, but you can't skimp on the interface between you and your box of love. And it's all wireless, making it perfect to use from the comfort of your couch. \$257 www.microsoft.com.au



#### Antec Lanbov Includes a 350W power supply, window and carry strap.

\$180 www.antec.inc.com

XXX

GeCube RADEON 9800 Yes, a 9800 in a budget system. Holy shit batman. \$445 Available from www.emagen.com.au

the beastie

The cheapest but worthiest PC of all,

gaming, the web and to generally have

the Beastie is for all of us who need

overclocking or our bank account.

fun without worrying about

AMD -Athon XP 2500+ Barton The cheapest CPUs keep getting meatier

and meatier \$146 www.amd.com



the open market \$220

it is even better

nForce2 is good and this implementation of

www.abit.com.tw \$132

512MB Corsair PC-3200 A budget PC with half a gig of RAM. All praise

www.corsairmemory.com

Abit NF7

Antec TrueControl 550W
What could be groovier than a PSU that comes with a 5.25" front plate with dials and knobs for controlling fan speed plastered all over it? Nothing, that's what.
\$210 www.antec-inc.com



#### Antec PlusView 1000AMG

An excellent pre-modded case, with more than enough fan mounts to keep your oc'd system nice and chillin'. And with this machine, you'll definitely make the most of the side window.

\$171 www.antec.inc.com



1GB Corsair TWINX-3200C2
Damn memory is getting cheap. Who'd have thought a year ago that you could now pick up a gig of rediculously fast DDR-RAM for a mere \$377? Not us, that's for sure.
\$377 www.corsairmemory.com



XpertVision RADEON 9800XT
Amusingly, the video card is the single most expensive component
of the Mutant, It's hard to believe that you can now get a RADEON
9800XT for a mere \$770, considering just how blazingly fast this o card is.

video card is. \$770 www.xpertvision..com.tw



\$119

DV

Creative Inspire 2500 2.1 Plug 'em in to the nForce2's onboard sound and it's MP3-tastic!

australia.creative.com

#### 80GB Seagate IDE Plenty of room for not much cash. Dependable and reliable

\$110 www.seagate.com

Zalman VGA Heatpipe Cooler 80C-HP Bolt this mighty thing to your video card, attach the included fan, and who knows what insane core speeds you can achieve? \$68 www.zalman.co.kr



120GB Seagate IDE The first upgrade HDD I ever bought was 6GB and cost \$447. So this is pretty damn cheap. Only standard IDE, but at this price we complain

\$146 www.seagate.com



Creative SB Audigy Lacks a few of the features found on the Audigy 2, but only the ones that don't really have much effect on gaming. There's a lot of soundcard here for not much cost.

\$129 australia.creative.com



#### MSUNG

Samsung 816BPRS 16x DVD-ROM

Good enough for all the PCs on this page, swift and reliable. www.samsung.com.au

Creative Inspire 6.1 6600
They're so cheap they're good enough for the Mutant. No decoder, no difficult optical inputs, just ordinary wires plugging in to a set of

\$249 australia.creative.com



# Samsung 252BRNS 52x24x52 CD-RW

Cheap, fast, reliable, what more could you want from a CD-RW?

\$59 ww.samsung.com.au



17" Samsung

SyncMaster 753S

#### Samsung 816BPRS 16x DVD-ROM

Same as the Beast, this drive is fast, dependable and has a slightly funkier facade than most of the beige monstrosities currently available.

\$62 www.samsung.com.au



To think 17" monitors were once worth \$800.1 love the technology of the future. \$226 www.samsung.com.au

#### Not content with owning your OS world MG MS Internet Value Pack vour OS world. MS are now ruling the I/O roost. \$64 www.kmepc.com



Samsung 252BRNS 52x24x52 CD-RW
Wow, these things sure got cheap didn't they? Burn CDs in hardly
any time at all thanks to 52x writing. Backup all your digital LAN
shots for posterity. Pose nude... no wait, don't.
\$59 www.samsung.com.au



RW ..

#### beastie value: \$17

So, you want one of these three fine beasts? Luckily, all of these components are available at Altech Computers www.altech.com.au 02 9735 5655



19" Samsung 995 Dynaflat Cheaper than the video card but still a lot of sleek, flat monitor. Nineteen inches is pretty much the minimum for decent gaming, and we carlt wait until a 16ms LCD this big costs this much. \$545 www.samsung.com.au

#### 4x Antec Internal Illuminate

Pep up the Mutant with a few light sticks. Stick 'em on the monitor, in the case, wherever you like. USB powered and respond to sound - clap on, clap off! Other cosmetic additions to the Creature are limited only by your imagination... \$176 www.antec-inc.com

**MUTANT VALUE: \$3665** 

# The Hub

# **YOUR ONLINE GAMING SERVER Compiled by Ed Dawson**

# **Rumble In The Jungle**

#### Games set in South-East Asian Jungles feature a little too heavily on the menu

ietnam is the action game flavour of the month. Everyone knows about the top-ten title Battlefield: Vietnam, you've also probably heard of the recent Viet Cong. But have you heard about Shellshock Nam '67 by Guerilla Games? Or Men of Valor (sic) by developer 2015? Not to mention the BF1942 mod Eve of Destruction? All of these are based on the Vietnam war. Is it just a taste for retro history causing us to dwell on certain past conflicts?

How is it that now, in 2004, we're fixated on one particular conflict that occurred roughly thirty years ago? Some would draw a link between the current Operation Iraqi Freedom (or Operation Catalyst, as far as the Australian involvement goes) and Vietnam. What do these conflicts have in common? Certainly, both are extremely controversial topics of public debate.

Similarly, both wars involved the enemy forces resisting with guerilla tactics and blending into the population. Whatever the cause for the rise in 'Nam games, there will soon be more of them available than you can point a stick at.

If the games are entertaining for the most part, then surely there's no need to complain. And maybe there really is no conspiracy theory behind the upswell of interest in Vietnam. A big part of the explanation could simply be technological. If you think

about it, we've only recently seen the advent of the rendering power required to adequately draw the potential thousands of twigs, ferns, grass blades, tree canopies, hanging vines, logs, rocks and other errata that would be expected to fit into your view at any given moment in a thickly overgrown forest. If you look back at older warthemed titles, they tend to be light on the jungles - for this very reason. So, now that we have the capability, those games can be made that much more compelling. Witness the latest mod to get coverage at E3, the aptly named "Jungle Warfare".

There's obviously some degree of fascination in the 20th century conflicts where the modern face of war began to reveal itself. The rise in the use of helicopters, measured psychological warfare and the emergence of technology like guided rockets – events that partly precipitated in

the Vietnam conflict.

We think it's a bit strange however, that we aren't mining history equilaterally. There's plenty of otherwise interesting battles besides Vietnam left to bring to life. How about the extraordinary Boxer Rebellion in China, circa 1898 or the Boer War which occurred around the same time?

The Boxer Rebellion, China, circa 1898. A surge of nationalism lead to the formation of a cultish group called the Fists of Righteous Harmony. When the Empress Dowager ordered the Fists to kill all foreigners, one of the great asymmetric battles of history resulted. The Fists had seized the capital Peking and had begun to slaughter all foreign diplomats and their families - but they were stopped, by an International Coalition including US Marines armed with rifles. Now there's a good war story.











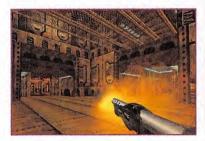
# **Code Red: Martian Chronicles**



For: Quake 2 🔳 Version: Total Conversion release 🔳 URL: www.planetquake.com/cor/codered/aquire.html 🖃 Size: 99MB 🔳 Score: 3/5

ode Red is a series of total conversion adventures involving blasting various comical martians with a collection of groovy weapons. This latest episode, Martian Chronicles, has vou sent into a base alone to reclaim control of it, in the best traditions of first-person shooters. Running on the Quake II engine, the wall textures and geometry are now starting to look awfully out of date. But, the character models are actually quite well animated and coded. Which is a good thing, as Martian Chronicles has a fairly long and involved single-player campaign. You'll upgrade through a spacey arsenal of laser guns, culminating in weapons like the flamethrower and old-school giant rocket launcher. Along the way, you'll get to ventilate a cute collection of oddball aliens, some of whom will vaporise when hit, dissolving into green smithereens.

Generally speaking, Martian Chronicles is a cute example of a totally indie game. Although the engine is really looking quite old, the characters will still induce a few chuckles. The developers are working on an all-new multiplayer project called "Alien Arena", which should be interesting. Stay tuned.



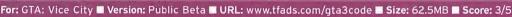




#### **BFV PATCHES**

The endless outcries of "OMFG U M60 Lam3R" can now cease with the long-awaited adjustment to this top ten firstperson-shooter set in the steamy jungles of Vietnam. The 1.01 patch addresses several muchbemoaned balance issues regarding the M60 machine gun and the "heavy" US kit which combined the M60 with the LAW anti-tank weapon. The heavy kit now contains an M14 rifle in place of the M60. Movement speed of players choosing the heavy class has been reduced and accuracy of the M60 and RPD guns have been adjusted. The patch also addresses miscellaneous bugs and improves large-game network performance.

# **GTA: Liberty City Beta v1**



slightly disturbing illustration of people's devotion to the GTA series, GTA: Liberty City is a mod for Vice City, which imports the entire city from GTA III to the Vice City engine. You need to own both games. This adds motorcycles and helicopters to the familiar old Mafia-dominated landscape, with many special adjustments like adding solid rooves to certain buildings for players to land on. It's



fun to explore the old environment from the air and do things like get into the stadium and visit that little island with the lighthouse, if you never managed to make it there with the wingless Dodo plane. Also, hitting all the old stunt ramps with the bike is fun - you can get to exciting new places! The amount of work that went into.

this is simply staggering. Literally thousands of items have been hand-tweaked to make them work in the new environment. It's times like this you realise what sort of impact GTA has had on people. And we're not immune to it. We'll admit to a



giddy little thrill or two when we discovered the "Brown Thunder" helicopter gunship and flew it around. This is essentially an experiment in asset conversion, but by golly, it's entertaining for those who know and love the setting.

#### UT2K4 PLUS

Volume 1 of the Unreal 2004 Community Pack 2 is now available. Bringing together the best of enthusiast-created assets including maps, models, skins and mutators. Weighing in at 199MB, Volume 1 UT 2004 Community Pack 2 includes four new maps for Onslaught, a large collection of deathmatch maps and one Assault map. The work of more than twenty people is showcased in the pack. Awesome coverage for those talented creators, also a great free addition to the game. With a new mutator included, you can even check out some allnew gameplay. Worth checking out.

# **Red Orchestra Beta 2.0**

For: UT 2004 ■ URL: http://redorchestramod.gameservers.net/ ■ Size: 420MB ■ Score: NA

#### **USE THE FORCE**

Star Wars Galaxies, the massively multiplayer online game set in George Lucas' beloved universe is offering a free 14-day trial. It is already available on a popular file-hosting site for subscribers only. SWG has, up to recent times only been available to paying customers, with no opportunity to "try before you buy". The game isn't technically sold or marketed here in Australia as it's recommended for use only "in the USA and Europe". Still, there are many keen Australian players willing to pay the subscription and take the risk of sluggish performance.







ed Orchestra is a WWII themed mod for UT 2004, concentrating on infantry combat. Admittedly, this does give this title the most intense competition imaginable, considering the enormous amount of WWII themed games and mods that seem to release every year. But nonetheless, Red Orchestra is well-presented and with a bit of polishing, could really give Day of Defeat a run for its money. You choose a side as one of the Axis or Allied forces and proceed to try and dominate control points, which are captured in much the same way flags are taken in Battlefield 1942. Red Orchestra features over 20 weapons and although it suffers from a few animation problems, its backgrounds, maps and models are of a very high quality. Walking down a street in a highland village, classic vehicles from the period are parked sporadically throughout the streets. Churches and other buildings show bomb damage on the roof and walls. A lot of work has gone into building up the world and environment - especially if you consider that virtually nothing from UT 2004 can be used in a WWII setting. Although it's too early to give this a score, keep an eye on Red Orchestra for the future - they're talking about adding vehicles!

\*Minimum monthly cost for this broadband and telephone package is \$73.45 per month (\$39.95 for starter 300MB plan and \$33.50 Optus phone line rental with 15¢ local calls). Quoted broadband price is only available when you take an Optus local and long distance home phone service. For technical or commercial reasons, broadband is not available to all areas. Not all homes can be connected to all Optus services and will depend on customer's location. OptusNet Broadband: ^Exceeding monthly Data Allowance will see your speed limited between 20Kbps and 28.8Kbps until the first day of the next billing month. Unused Data Allowance cannot be rolled into subsequent months. Use of the service is subject to the Customer Terms and Acceptable Use Policy. See www.optus.com.au/optusnet\_sfoa for details. \$300 pro-rata early disconnection fee applies. OptusNet Cable: Optus reserves the right to quote for non-standard installations. A \$2.20 monthly fee applies if account is not paid by direct debit. Minimum total cost is \$628.40 for 12 months (includes \$179 installation and a \$30 direct debit rebate) plus current monthly line rental. OptusNet DSL: Minimum total cost is \$628.40 for 12 months (includes \$149 installation) plus current

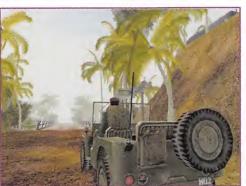


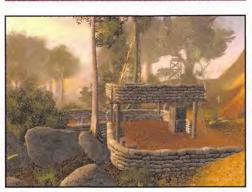


# **Eve of Destruction v0.31 Alpha**

For: battlefeild 1942 ■ Version : Alpha ■ URL: www.planetbattlefield.com/eod/ ■ Size: 479MB + 4mb patch ■ Score: 4/5

et in Vietnam, Eve of Destruction is another contemporary jungle combat game vying for supremacy. An exquisitely coded mod, this was actually released prior to Battlefield: Vietnam. Playing it is really interesting, as of course the weapons bear great similarity, coming from the same historical source but the gameplay and exact flavour of the challenge is of course different. Your engineers basically have the stock Battlefield 1942 equipment, but the environments especially in Eve of Destruction are fantastic. From a claustrophobic river valley teeming with swampy water, where you can rarely put your feet on solid ground, to a dusty hill which is assaulted from all sides, the mood and feeling seems to be well captured. Since Battlefield: Vietnam has released, the developers have staunchly decided to continue on despite this direct competition. They are porting the mod to be a mod of BFV, which may be released by the time you read this. It's really interesting to see these plucky mod developers going head-on with the commercial product. Considering people's grievances with BFV, they stand a great chance of stealing some of the thunder.











#### UO TURNS 7

September 2004 sees the arrival of the seventh anniversary of Ultima Online's launch, As part of the celebrations, EA is launching a special 7th Anniversary Edition. This edition contains all current patches as well as a series of extra goodies. You'll get one of seven rare and powerful in-game items, an extra character slot (upping the total to six), seven Buddy Registration Codes, an exclusive UO Fan Guide (featuring rare art and team interviews) and a full version of the classic game Ultima IX: Ascension. We're not sure how many players are left out there who have an urge to join this most elderly of MMORPGs, but this special edition could be a good excuse.

monthly line rental. Optus Local Telephony: Call charges are extra. Free standard installation of your telephone line(s) applies to applicable call plans. A New Number fee applies if you do not transfer your existing phone number. \*On the 15¢ call plan you receive your first 100 standard local calls free per month. General: A \$99 pro-rata disconnection fee may apply to some Optus Local Telephony plans &/or preselected Long Distance if disconnected within 12 months. Full terms & conditions apply. All information correct as at 1 March 2004. Prices subject to change without notice. 'yes' rewards March 2004 Terms and Conditions apply and the offer expires 30th June 2004 unless withdrawn earlier. SingTel Optus Pty Limited trading as Optus Communications 101 Miller Street North Sydney 2060. Optus, the Optus logo, 'yes' and Optus FreeTime are trademarks of SingTel Optus Pty Limited. Optus Communications services are provided by Optus Networks Pty Ltd ABN 92 008 570 330.

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# BOOTCAMP

**Online Tips and Tactics** 

It's no secret that Far Cry is one of the most popular and visually spectacular games in recent times. What does it take to take down an island full of Jack Carvers online? Ed Dawson dons the Hawaiian shirt...



#### **ACCURACY**

Lying prone will improve your average spread, but the reduction in visibility you suffer is often questionable. Considering the fast pace of play, crouching is often a better option, as it doesn't leave you "locked" in that mode when you let go of the key.

#### **BINOCULARS**

You'll want to use your binoculars constantly. What you're relying on is the Binocs ability to auto-detect foes, and point them out to you. Visibility is often impaired by plants or distance, and seeing the enemy first is imperative in Far Cry. Whenever you can't see any enemies, try a quick scope with the Binocs - and maybe even bind it to Mouse3.

#### **STAMINA**

Running for your life certainly makes sense; try to do it in short bursts. That way, your stamina bar can be recharging more often than not - saving you from running dry and having to waddle slowly through a hail of bullets.

#### COVER

Lethality in Far Cry is explosive, so a single wound is one hit too many. If you've got a tree, ledge, fence or barricade that can take some of the incoming fire, use it. Get it nice and close to your centre-line, but placed so you can still fire past it. If you know foes are right on top of you, try leaning out from behind total cover and snapping off a few cheap shots. Your frag count will thank you.



# The Secret Diary of MMO

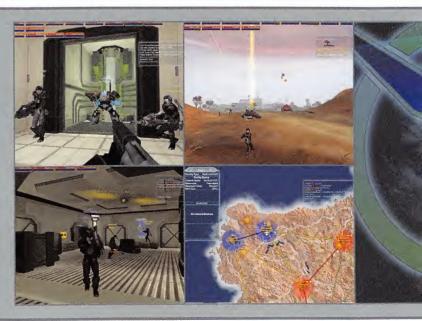
Chapter I - My Life in the Service by George Soropos

It's always the scientists. It's always harder hitting weapons than our those nosey, self absorbed, crazy haired scientists that get us into these messes. They were the ones who discovered the warp gate that stranded us here and they were the ones that discovered the alien Vanu technology that was supposed to get us home. The damn fools even made us immortal.

Our colony has split into three factions now and our Terran Republic has two new enemies, the New Conglomerate and those Vanu Sovereignty freaks; the Smurfs and the Barneys. The Smurfs have

forces - don't ask me where they got them. The Vanu Sovereignty, Barney's because of their purple uniforms, have become alien worshipers. They seem to think that the ancient tech we found here on Auraxis is the answer to everything. The matrixing tech that can store and relocate our consciousness is ancient Vanu, and what a boon that's turned out to be. I've lost count of the number of times I've been fragged already, must be in the hundreds by now.

Personally I think this



#### **ASSAULT MODE**

In Assault mode you must choose a class. Three flag positions must be taken by the offensive team. They start off held by the defensive team. Fight!



#### **GUNNER CLASS**

You've basically got to choose between the three best machine-guns - although the OICW (with the chunky scope) seems to be the favourite over the faster-firing AG36 rifle. It also has a flatter grenade trajectory, and ability to rapidly fire multiple grenades. You're going to do most of

the work creating havoc and disarray in the enemy troops. On offence, you've got to move into the flag zone, taking down enemies as you go. Defensively, you'll want to pick a spot with good cover and an exit path - then lay down a thick coat of lead when the enemy arrives.

#### **SNIPER CLASS**

There are few options here, beyond choosing rifle or rocket. You'll want to find a nice high place, which gives you a vantage over your target area - be that the area surrounding the flag on offence, or the direction your invaders are coming from on defence. It makes sense to sight down a straight path such as a road or valley.



#### **ENGINEER CLASS**

You're seriously underpowered as this player, so it pays to choose your loadout wisely. You must decide between the health or the M4 rifle. Considering that you're reduced to the pistol without it, many will take the M4. Keep in mind though, with your maximum of seven health packs,

you can take several lives worth of injury and keep advancing. You can also keep a whole squad above the red line - especially when you're near a resupply station. Your smoke grenades are useful to help screen an advance over open territory. Engineer's time bombs aren't super useful, probably best applied on the flag zone when the enemy is coming in. Otherwise, they're too slow to go off and can't be triggered. Finally, your wrench can repair vehicles, which can save you a long walk when you're on offence.

#### DEATHMATCH

Far Cry deathmatch is an utterly chaotic and lethal free-for-all. Move fast, stay alert and use Binoculars as if they're glued to your eyes, leaning and peeking around every corner. If you notice a battle going on indoors, chuck a few grenades in the windows. Play the numbers game.

#### **TEAM DEATHMATCH**

This mode is all about the kills. Lethality and surviving are your primary concerns - make your enemies die for their cause, while you recharge and reload. Camp like a Girl Scout if you have to - the name of this game is frags, no matter how cheaply attained.



immortality thing is making more than a few of us go a bit strange. Just the other day a neighbor of mine, a now redundant eye, nose and throat specialist, had his name changed by deed poll to nOObStalker99! Now all he talks about is getting enough certifications for an infiltration suit so he can sneak into the women's shower block. The worrying part is that he only wants to get in there to steal the soap; he doesn't like the smell of the stuff in the men's.

For my part I've always wanted to be a pilot but I've got another two certifications points to go before I can take off in my first Reaver. Until then I'll do my time as a grunt. The Terran Republic has the best grunt guns, the fastest firing and most flexible. Our

Cycler assault rifle is the fastest firing weapon on Auraxis and our grenades can do a lot of damage too. It's just a matter of finding a good squad to move with and not getting too cocky.

The teamwork and strategy required in battle were both difficult things to get to grips with at first. Hardly any of us are trained soldiers and we're just learning as we go. Sure you can run around on your own all over Auraxis if you want to, if you're crazy, but you will be left behind by everyone else. War is a team effort and I soon learned to listen to my squad and platoon leaders - that's the quickest way to learn. My next step is to find a permanent home with a good outfit to help me get those certs even faster!

#### **MULTIPLAYER VERDICT**

Being such an exciting single player game, some wondered whether the huge arsenal and outdoor action would translate well to multiplayer. Thankfully, the clever Assault mode with player classes and limitations saves Far Cry from the problems it might have faced using a simple "Capture the Flag" option. In this way, they've balanced certain elements of the game without slowing it down or changing it too drastically. And it still looks fantastic. Watching your cheeky sniping friend fly through the air, ragdolling like crazy after you gave him a grenade for a seat-cushion is a very satisfying feeling. Essentially, Far Cry is such a well-constructed package, that we'd be badly disappointed if the multiplayer was no good. Thankfully, it's great fun.



## YOUR ARSENAL

#### FRAG GRENADE

Grenades in Far Cry are nasty. When things don't look good, drop a few grenades into the vicinity. They may outlive you and get revenge.

#### FALCON

The pistol. This should really be avoided if you have anything else at all. Your very last resort before a suicide run with the knife.

#### 90. MP5

These SMG's rattle off rounds nice and quickly, best applied at short range. The MP5 is more stealthy, while the P90 holds a much larger clip. The choice is yours.

#### SHOTGUN

While nasty at point-blank, this should be reserved for indoor corridor shootouts, due to its

#### **AW50 SNIPER RIFLE**

The ultimate in long-range assassination. Your only problem will likely be ammunition. If you're lurking on a hilltop, choose one close to a place where you can fill up occasionally.

#### **M4 CARBINE**

The stock assault rifle, only rely on this if you can't get a higher grade machine gun.

#### AG36 ASSAULT RIFLE, OICW Advanced Assault Rifle

These two are very similar, although the OICW (with the chunky scope) has a nearly flat grenade trajectory and a semi-auto grenade fire rate. But, the AG36 bullet firing rate is faster.

#### M249 SAW MG

This chunky MG has many advantages. Its 100 round belt, whopping lethality and material penetration through most objects make it a favourite for base assaults. Reloading leaves you vulnerable though.

#### **ROCKET LAUNCHER**

As these rockets fly reasonably slowly, it's actually fairly hard to actively hit anything fast moving with them. Better used to bombard a position, or aimed down the length of a road.

#### **FIXED GUNS**

The Vulcan miniguns and mortars you find may dish out the business, but the unfortunate way they force you to stand up like a bullet-attracting scarecrow is bad. Better be ready to cash in your chips and leap off the position when you're using these.

#### FLASHBANG SMOKE GRENADE

These have more impact than you'd think. Flashbangs in particular can give you the edge over a room full of enemies, Smoke usefully covers assaults over open ground.

#### VEHICLES

The buggy and the 4WD are both nice and fast, great for running people down. The 4WD rocket launcher in particular (change fire mode) can be fantastic to wipe people out at a flag, with a constant explosive barrage from afar. In boats, you're trading speed and firepower for high visibility and no zoom.

# FRVI

After lending a helping hand to such games as Civilization, Colonization, Alpha Centauri and Master of Orion, Tim Train hooked up with Brian Reynolds to form Big Huge Games. Timothy C. Best chats to him about Rise of Nations, expansions, cable television and Nirvana...

Name: Tim Train

Title: Vice President of Operations and Development

Company: Big Huge Games

Location: L.A., California
Projects: Sid Meier's Civilization, Masters of Orion, Command HQ, Darklands,
Sid Meier's Colonization, Alpha Centauri, Alpha Centauri: Alien Crossfire,

Rise of Nations, Rise of Nations: Throne & Patriots

Rise of Nations was such a big game to start with, how do you know what to add when it comes to an expansion?

Well there's lots of different ways that we approach that. One of them is that we listen to our fans on the boards and see what kinds of things they're interested in. There are definitely a lot of their ideas that have worked their way into Thrones and Patriots. Another thing is that we look at where some things we tried but didn't quite make work the first time. The governments are a good example of that. We originally put governments in Rise of Nations and we kind of played with them for a while, but they didn't really work out too well so we took them out. When we came back we thought: "All right, let's try this with the expansion pack." We did, and it worked out to be pretty darn fun, so we kept them in.

#### So how do you know if something is working for the game?

In general, we work off what we call the prototype method. That basically means that we try to get a playable game up and running as soon as possible and we take a look at the prototype and see what's fun about it. Everyday we play the game and we meet and talk about what was fun. what was lame, what was good and

Then we go back and do some coding and come up with an all-new playable prototype, maybe even two or three hours after we last played the game, and it's really a process of refinement. You pump up the stuff that's cool; get rid of the stuff that's not and at the end of the day we've got a game that we've been playing. In the case of the expansion pack we've been playing it for about six

solid months now, and we've loved it the whole way.

So even with all the experience on board at Big Huge Games you tend to let a game evolve rather than using a vision as a blueprint? Rather than having a vision I would say that we have inspiration. We get inspired to try some things and do some new things, but ultimately it has all got to come back to the player. If the player's not having fun - if they're not having a good time - then that shows in those usability sessions. Then, no matter what we thought we were pursuing, we have to be able to let it go and make the game be fun for players because that's what it's all about.

It makes me wonder why more game companies don't use prototyping. Surely it helps you avoid some of the bigger pit falls? I don't really know why anybody in the world wouldn't develop that way for RTS games. With other types of games you have a little bit of difficulty with the fact that you have to have a lot of your design in place before you have your content in place - like a first person shooter or RPG so you can't really afford to do a prototype method.

I know that sometimes the publisher has issues. They want to see organisation. They want to see ideas on paper. Then you get stuck in kind of doing milestones that are based on your design document. If they don't think the developer can pull it off then sometimes the publisher won't give the developer the freedom to work that way.

What have you learnt from developing Rise of Nations and

#### Throne of Patriots?

What we felt like we learnt with this game was: always aim to have your graphics being the best in the industry. We think that maybe some other games got more recognition and notice because they were flashier but not necessarily any better gameplay-wise.

Even when you are talking strategy games, you still need to have the best graphics in your genre. Players do want good production values in their games and they are willing to go out and buy those. The other thing that we learnt, more globally, is the value of having a good team dynamic, or having a great team to work with, or having a great place to come to work everyday.

#### On a more general level, do you think that the games industry is on track?

I think that we're basically on the right track. I would love to see a little more innovation and a little more risk taking but I think that is going to happen as a result of a couple of factors. One is there's more and more money as the market grows for games. When a game costs \$20 million and has to sell four million units to break even - or whatever - that's when you get publishers that are really scared of innovation. If that same product can sell 8 million copies then they get a little less scared of the risk involved. The other thing is, personally, I see games now where television was 30 years ago. In America at least, you only really had three networks that were broadcasting shows, so those networks had to aim for the lowest common denominator. Their shows had to be really popular and if they weren't, they got pulled really quickly and that led to a fair amount of bland

entertainment, but then, in the 80s an explosion of cable, then later on you had satellite, with hundreds of channels that all needed content meant they could specialise in niche markets like World War II documentaries or nature channel stuff. I think that as the market for games gets bigger, and it might take 5 or 10 years, then you'll start to see products that are innovative, high productionvalue products that are geared towards special interests and I'm waiting for that day.

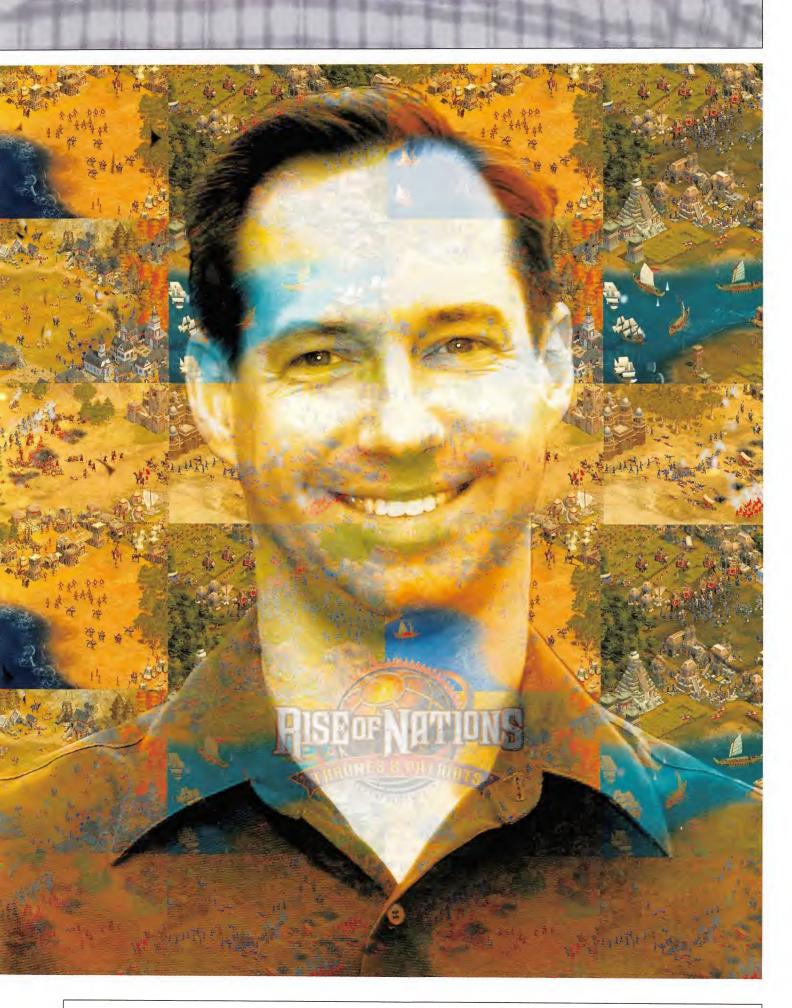
There seems to be a lot of cloned games out there, and a lot of a mentality of follow the leader. What do you think needs to happen to change this general trend or do you think it comes down to giving the public what it really wants? I think it's a combination of the public wants and also what the publisher wants. I think that what more than a lot of people realise the games business is analogous to the music and movie industry.

We are an entertainment business and it's a mass marketed entertainment business these days. So, what that means is that if there's a hit band that comes out, Nirvana or something like that, and those guys are the ones that sell fifty quadra-billion copies of their album then you'll also hear a tonne of other bands that sound remarkably like Nirvana.

I guess to a certain extent the public likes the things it's familiar with. I think a publisher feels more comfortable backing something that seems like it has market that's out there. And the combination of those things is the reason why you get a lot of "me too" kind of games.

If you could revolutionise the industry in one way what would it be?

Well, I guess, mostly we like to make people feel like games really are for everyone, when you are talking about the culture. At least in the Untied States there is still a pretty strong stigma against game players and that's changing but it's changing kind of slowly and you don't have a lot of people bought off on the idea that spending ten hours a week playing games, say as much as you might spend watching television ... people still perceive that television is a more valid form of entertainment than games are. So, on a social level, that is something I'd like to change.



# THE DISCO

#### **REQUESTS**

We welcome requests so please forward your requests to Disc Producer Amos Hong via email at cdgod@next.com.au or write to PCPP DVD Requests, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016





nother year, another E3 has come and gone. This month, the DVD contains several trailers from E3 2004. In fact the disc has sixteen game trailers and a very special E3 show tour video filmed by our very own Joel Graham. Aside from the movies, we also have trials of the online game Eve Online and Singles. It should be noted that Singles: Flirt up your life contains content suitable only for adults.

The demos section this month has games like Ground Control 2, Kreed, Codename: Panzers and TrackMania. There are also several small demos to try out. They are very enjoyable, so I urge you to have a go!!

The mods section this month has version 2.0 of Red Orchestra, the mod that drops you right into the front lines of the eastern conflict of World War II. Should be a hoot! We also have the Quake III mod, Code Red: Martian Chronicles and GTA: Liberty City, a mod for GTA: Vice City.

The Bunker has a lot of goodies,

The Bunker has a lot of goodies, like free games, map packs and programs. So many thanks to ROM for all his hard work. In terms of patches, the disc has upgrades for V8 SuperCars 2 and Battlefield Vietnam.

Amos Hong Disc Master cdgod@next.com.au

#### **DVD CONTENTS**

#### **SPOTLIGHT**

The Twelve Kingdoms [DVD Episode] EVE Online The Sims 2 Body Shop



#### E3 MOVIES

The E3 show tour Advent Rising BloodRayne 2 Black & White 2 Ghost Recon 2 Half-Life 2 MoH: Pacific Assault Playboy: The Mansion Rome: Total War The Sims 2 Star Wars Battlefront



The Movies
Tribes: Vengeance
CoD: United Offensive
Vanguard: Saga of Heroes
Warhammer Online
Zoo Tycoon 2

#### DEMOS

Ground Control: Operation Exodus Kreed Codename: Panzers Perimeter Singles: Flirt up your life TrackMania Abandoned Well Aqua Bubble 2 Bubble Ice Age Jig-Swap Puzzle Swap & Fall Tiny Cars 2

#### MODS

Code Red: Martian Chronicles



[Quake III] GTA: Liberty City [GTA:VC] Red Orchestra v2.0 [UT2004]

#### **PATCHES**

Battlefield Vietnam v1.01 Hitman: Contracts v1.74 Patch [UK-US] V8 Supercars 2 v1.2 Warcraft III v1.15 Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne v1.15

#### UTILITIES

DivX Player (with DivX Codec) 5.1.1 - f GetRight 5.1 - s Windows Media Player 9 - f



Winamp 5.03 - f WinRAR 3.3 - s WinZip 9.0 - s

#### **BUNKER**

Heaps more wallpaper, free games, Winamp skins, map packs and addon files for all your favourite games.



#### CD 1 DEMOS

Singles: Flirt up your Life TrackMania

#### UTILITIES

The Sims 2 Body Shop

#### CD 2 DEMOS

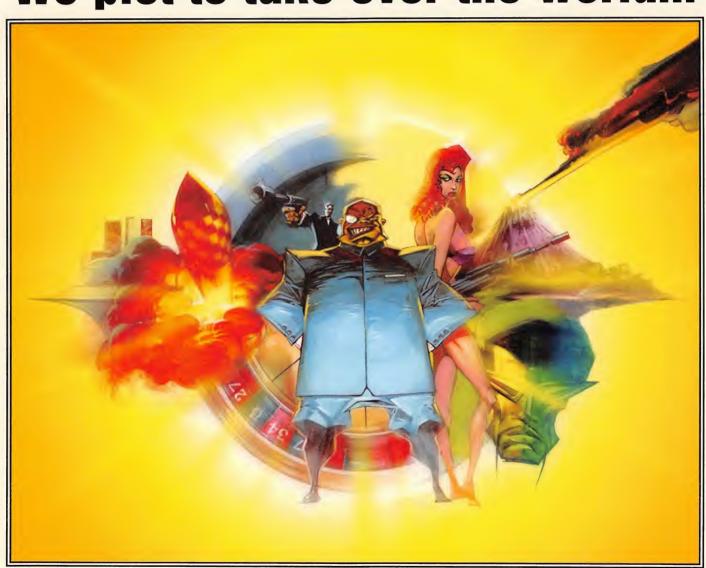
Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus Kreed Codename: Panzers

#### **TRAILERS**

LSL: Magna Cum Laude RollerCoaster Tycoon 3 Thief: Deadly Shadows



# We plot to take over the world...



**BWA-HA-HA-HA!** 



# **Your Restaurant Sucks**

Adventures in reality web broadcasting

omeone once said that the Internet is society's mirror, in the sense that if you go out into society and pick something that most people would consider a reasonable success - say, reality television - then you will be able to find an internet version of it that is a dismal, unmentionable failure.

I speak of course about reality web broadcasting. The boots and I have a special place in our hearts for reality web broadcasting. It's right next to the special place for Nazi war criminals, down the hall from the special place for Mission Humanity, Daikatana and Robocop.

Nevertheless, we still get invited to the occasional launch for an amazing new kind of reality web broadcast, run by a massively topheavy web company that produces nothing and has no prospects. You must remember the kind of company I'm talking about - there were heaps of them popping up like mushrooms at the turn of the millennium. They promised us an "awesome Internet experience" with streaming video, real interactivity, and a customer rewards system.

Naturally, every single one of these companies tanked during the dotcom bust, or in some cases earlier since they were run entirely by failed PR hacks with no imagination. "Visit our site for a chance to win a Porsche!" So we would dutifully visit the site, only to find that there was nothing on the site except an entry form for the competition. Six months later, they had to give away a Porsche. Had they produced anything in the meantime? No. Had they sold the names and addresses for the people who entered to a marketing company? No.

It may surprise you to learn that a few of these companies still exist today. They are born from the minds of the same no-talent hacks who wasted \$3 million of good, clean VC four years ago. Hacks like Steve Guttenberg (yes, that really is his name), a plastic smile attached to a plastic man. Steve's real skill is his ability to get venture capitalists to give him money for no reason at all.

"Broadband penetration is really picking up in Australia," he told the boots and I as we arrived at the launch of his latest scheme. "The time is right to create a new kind of entertainment, a rich experience of multimedia and streaming content with extreme user interaction and the chance to win hot prizes, just for surfing the web and reading emails.'

'What about the penis extensions?" I asked.

"That's phase two. Phase one is reality web broadcasting. We think Australians are very much ready for a new kind of experience, a broadband streamed reality experience where young hip couples use their brains and talent to run a restaurant in Sydney's exclusive Cockle Bay Wharf development," said Guttenberg.

We stood in a brand new pretend restaurant kitchen in a brand new pretend restaurant out the back of all the established restaurants at Cockle Bay. The kitchen was inside the new webcasting studios that Guttenberg's latest wad of VC had

paid for, which included awesome equipment and no one competent enough to run it. There was a guy in a control booth poking randomly at buttons, and great chunks of the set were sliding up and down on steel ropes behind us.

The set itself consisted of a raised dais upon which sat a stainless steel kitchen setup, including gas burners, a deep fryer, a bread machine, a microwave and for some reason, a huge metal brazier full of white-hot coals. A cast-iron Dutch oven sat on the bench top. A pair of gormless and shiny young hopefuls stood behind the equipment, ready to start cooking, apparently.

"I'd like you to meet Sandy and Randy," said Guttenberg as he guided me, the boots and my notepad closer toward the set with the practiced ease of the PR commandant. "They've been selected from an audition pool of more than six couples to launch the show tonight on double-u double-u double-u eat my sharks dot com," said Guttenberg.

"Hi," said Randy and Sandy in unison.

"Each hour, the couple must complete another dish, whereupon the audience votes for them to stay for the next course or to fight each other to death in a cage full of motorcycles.' Guttenberg made a gesture and another piece of the set shot skyward revealing, yes indeed, a cage full of motorcycles. "Would you like to turn the big blue key?"

There was a big blue key in the middle of a likewise blue cube, upon which was trained the glassy stare of a single digital camera worth more than my life.

'Um, sure?" I said, since both the boots and I prefer to jump feet-first - as it were - into life's uncertainties. We turned the key. Guttenberg indicated the big monitor in the otherwise empty studio, which showed the site's mascot logo - an Amazonian grey parrot. A crude animation of a cartoon man and woman cooking began to play, jerkily.

'What the hell is going on here?" I muttered to the boots. Guttenberg gave me a shiny, shiny smile. Music began to play. Lights strobed. The guy in the control both indicated by use of signs that there were more than fifteen people logged in to the site at that exact moment.

'We don't believe in sacrificing the quality of the multimedia experience," said Guttenberg in a stage whisper, "so we're webcasting in full DVD quality, with six channel audio and multiple viewing angles. It works best on an 8Mbit connection, although you should be able to get at least five or six frames a second on 1500k ADSL." "Right," I said.

The kids up on the dias had already launched into their preparations, no doubt fearing the wrath



"And now!" boomed the disembodied voice of a retired radio personality, "Here's Hokey!"

"Hokey is the parrot," explained Guttenberg.

"Our mascot. You know, for the children."

"Right," I said again.

There was a pause. Then the bread machine started rattling. It rattled along the top of the bench, much to the disquiet of Randy and Sandy (who were throwing large handfuls of lemon grass onto the hot coals, possibly as an offering to their heathen gods of the Ikea catalogue). Then the bread machine tipped on its side. It shuddered once or twice. Then a whole bunch of black smoke poured out of the vent in the top. Then it

It was only a small explosion, and while the heat of the thing took the eyebrows off Randy, it was the cloud of singed feathers that really gave all of us pause.

"This hour's dish!" cried the retired radio personality, ad libbing like hell. "Exploded Amazonian grey parrot!"

Canned applause kicked in. "Vote now!" said the main monitor.

"Oh crap," said Guttenberg. "The RSPCA is going to break my hands."

And that's when the commandos burst through the skylights and abseiled into the studio. After the gunfight I sat on the kerb outside with the sergeant and we swapped web broadcasting war stories.

Later, we buried Hokey with full military honours. Apparently he'd been a sleeper agent and his grenade had gone off prematurely. War may be hell, but web broadcasting is worse. Remember that.





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